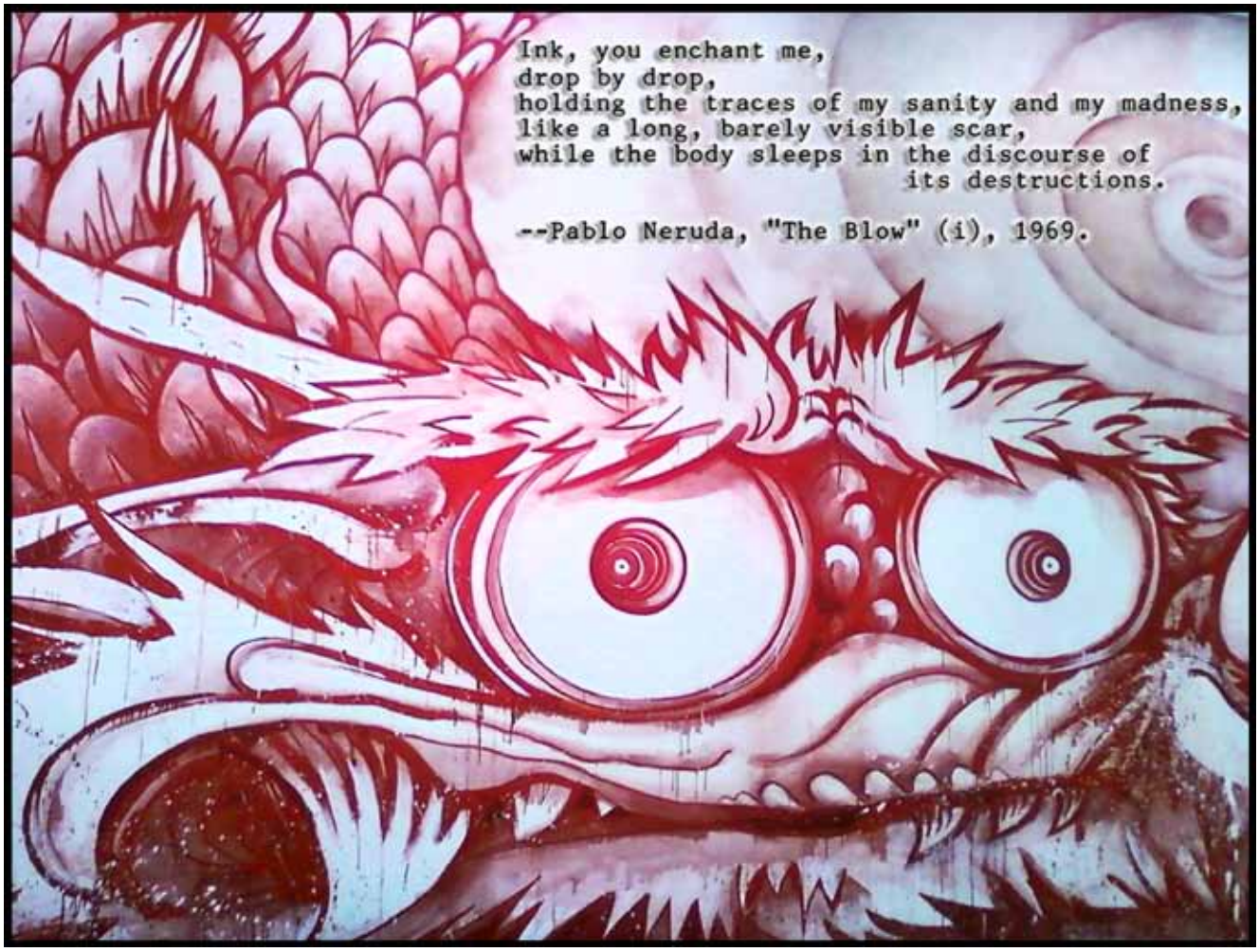
The Cenacle

23rd Anniversary Issue
Number 103 • April 2018


Ink, you enchant me,
drop by drop,
holding the traces of my sanity and my madness,
like a long, barely visible scar,
while the body sleeps in the discourse of
its destructions.
--Pablo Neruda, "The Blow" (i), 1969.

April 28, 2018
2:08 a.m.
Bungalow Cee - Green Couch
Milkrose, Mass.

— Welcome to the 23rd Anniversary issue of The Cenacle! First issue of 2018, as the anniversary issues usually are. So the double delight in that. Full end to end of the kind of superfine writing & graphic artwork that render me happy & humble to be publishing them.

I am sitting on a beloved old green couch which has travelled across many years & miles with Kassi & me. I own a lot of beloved items, & grateful to have a home to keep them safe in.

I know I also carry along still much with little or no value left, just the habit of association. Some of these are things, but some are ideas, old bitter & sad memories, habits formed in times & places long passed.

I wonder: what aches & which joys

in our hearts strengthen us for the new steps we take with each new day, point us more clearly toward the new roads we'd like to think are still waiting for us to find & to try?

And which are just stones tied to our ankles, boots impeding our hearts & spirits?

How does one train as wild a thing as the human mind to heed the generous, tolerant, curious, & healthful in life, & push away the slothful, the envious, the despairing, the prejudicial, the cruel?

We are free but of our bodies & our mortalities. Free but of our inconsistencies. Free but of our darkest curiosities, & weirdest, most reason-less predilections.

Free of all but each other, & what's gone past, & the unknowns yet to come.

We strive to accept each other, to understand one another better, to sow tolerance by our deeds & our words. Sometimes this is beautifully easy to do. Other times not.

I think something in the general human spirit rebels against order, & safety & peace. Our modern aspect may adore a well-built home, & secure bond of friends & family, a predictable material reward for skills honed & used to benefit one's fellows.

But something just as important gnaws at these gentle bonds, hears in them an inexorable ticking down to the grave. We chafe at safety & strictures, & compacts that narrowly define what a person can & cannot, even should or should not do.

Nothing, not society, nor loved ones, nor the sometimes sweet but sometimes sibilant philosophies roiling my heart, can tell me, truly & finally, what I should possess, what I should let go. Maybe I'm not built to continuously need either common sense's plain cone-shifter or cataclysm's siren cackle.

What striving to fill the pages of The Cenacle does for me — & I hope, by extension, does

for many of you — is to bring me close, dear & dear, & in wonderful variety to the toil & ferment in the hearts & minds of so many living Artists I know & admire.

I struggle alone, yes.
We struggle together, yes.
A lesson needing constant learning.

If I did not edit this journal, if I were not started it & continued it through now, tonight, & far hence, I would be a different & lesser Artist & man. I would be more alone in my struggle. I would be less happy for carrying around fewer voices in my head.

I would be a poorer soul. As such, I say, as before, but with this moment's fresh fervor, thank you, every contributor & reader. Thank you for making my life profoundly better. I love you all. We carry on. 4/28/2018

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Accompanying disk to print version contains:

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- *RaiBooks* #1-8
- RS Mixes from "Within's Within: Scenes from the Psychedelic Revolution"; &
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Thank you to the hard workers at National Grid for keeping the lights on here at the Bungalow Cee, & for restoring them as quickly as you did during the recent Nor'easters that passed through New England.

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2018

Feedback on Cenacle 102 | December 2017

From Judih Haggai:

On a hot, sun-filled bus ride into the city, I picked up *Cenacle* 102.

To begin one's reading with Raymond Soulard Jr.'s love letter to a dear departed poet / guitarist is like to begin a t'ai chi session by doing chi cong. Energy flows, unleashed.

And so I proceeded to read Mark Shorette's poetry, and each mysterious image hit a different cell in my heart. Each node of contact was unique. "Violent acts of salvation" and "the mandala of the half drawn world"—both phrases communicated deeply to me.

I went on to Joe Ciccone's poetry and responded to "the naked fisherman / lost in an ocean of land." A reminder of how I'm always lost, on land or sea, except for those few moments when I'm hugging a loved one.

Just as I was heading towards Tamara Miles, I reached my bus station, having to make a mad dash towards a poetry meeting 10 minutes away.

I'm looking forward to more. Thanks, all.

* * * * * *

From Ace Boggess:

Joe Ciccone's poems are rich with such soulful simplicity that reading them is like floating in a warm pool. "Morning," especially, mesmerized me with its Neruda-like qualities. As reader, I feel the narrator's passion, but also something distant, not easily explainable—a glimpse at the horizon. Ciccone's poems in this issue make me want to read more of his work.

* * * * * *

From Tamara Miles:

Two poems have kept me busy in the latest *Cenacle*: "Island of Bone" and "Seafood" by Joe Ciccone. I've tried to visualize the Island of Bone. I try to situate it in the world, try to get myself to it and experience the gray/not gray-ness of its atmosphere. I imagine it inhabited by ghosts who pick up the bones of their beloved and sniff them, roll their fingers over them in the way an elephant rolls its trunk over the bones of one of its own. The ghosts walk out on the water, ride in again on a wave, and this is memory as well as invitation to love anew. That's the trick, I think . . . Joe gave me a fragment of an island, a finger-bone I can caress.

"Seafood" also intrigues me because of what I know and what I don't know. I know it for a poem about grief and anger and trying to make up for loss as well as to avoid creating loss for others. I understand the lobster in the water, going from life to edible death. I understand the shriek and the quiet, and a father who disappears and reappears later in the mirror. What I'm working out is the god part, and the salvation for us all that must be waiting in the next lobster pot.

* * * * * *

From Jimmy Heffernan:

I was delighted by Tamara Miles' charming and evocative poem, "Man Pleads Guilty to Trying to Smuggle Tiger Cub." This majestic piece paints a picture of a jungle cat so vividly I could almost see its stripes. It evokes the purity and dignity in nature, and gives the distinct impression that humans, at least by now, cannot compete with such a beast in the grandeur of its essence.

* * * * * *

From Nathan D. Horowitz:

Charlie Beyer's prose continues ripping apart mountains for sapphires and coming up with language. Earthy and philosophical, like Bukowski in a tent, the man is incapable of writing a boring sentence. Perhaps his cat Pomo helps him.

Tamara Miles gives us more of her splendid ongoing warts-and-all memoir and family history project. Her approach reminds me of William Carlos Williams' injunction "not to talk in vague categories but to write particularly, as a physician works, upon a patient, upon the thing before him in the particular to discover the universal."

* * * * * *

From Colin James:

To paraphrase a line from Paul Theroux: Charlie Beyer's prose puckers like a male hooker . . .

* * * * * *

From Charlie Beyer:

This issue's *From Soulard's Notebooks* hits an internal bone—hard—as so many have dropped dead in my brief life. I am happy to be unpopular, as them whom the Gods love die young. But it is lonely to have loved and lost and, as Raymond says, we wish these wonderful souls had the science and knowledge for longevity that is available today. Sadly, such wisdom has not gotten to Mississippi or Walmart.

* * * * * *

From Martina Newberry:

I am struck by the amazing, beautiful work in this issue. The poets, the storytellers—all of it is a lightning bolt of fine work, of strength, of tenderness.

* * * * * *

In Early May

In early May
The bud-green mountains
Climb the blue,
And I climb with them.

I too
Am wild and ready.

I too:
Hiker—
Seeker.

* * *

Climbing

Up the red rock cliff we climb
Sometimes guided by the peak
Sometimes trying firmer holds
We sometimes find the love we seek

Art
Art is Spirit in search of itself
The seeker in silence
Alone with the light
Along the low road
Along the hill path
Along mountain trails
Among towering crags
and climbing
sheer
cliffs

Writing
Writing is Spirit hunting itself
The singer in silence
Alone with the sound
As storms to the mountain
As cascades to streamlets
As rivers to oceans
As waves to a beach
As flumes to a fountain
and water
to
falls

Climbing
Climbing is Spirit's reach for itself
Crag seeker in silence
Alone with the wind
Like art to the artist
Like writing to books
Like song to the singer
Like play to the child

Up the whale summit now
Always guided by the peak
Always finding firmer holds
We sometimes are the love we seek.

* * *

Antler

On Lamentation Mountain
In the green and shadowed deer park
Found
An antler from the past

A sign
Of what?

What battles fought?
What triumph?
What despair of loss
For what brown eyed doe
Did this stag's
Antler toss?

The disdain,
The furious hate,
The sparks
From the wild hoofed rocks
And clash of antlers
In the mountain night.

What lifetimes lived
Down centuries
Found
In the green and shadowed deer park
On Lamentation Mountain.

* * *

Ascent

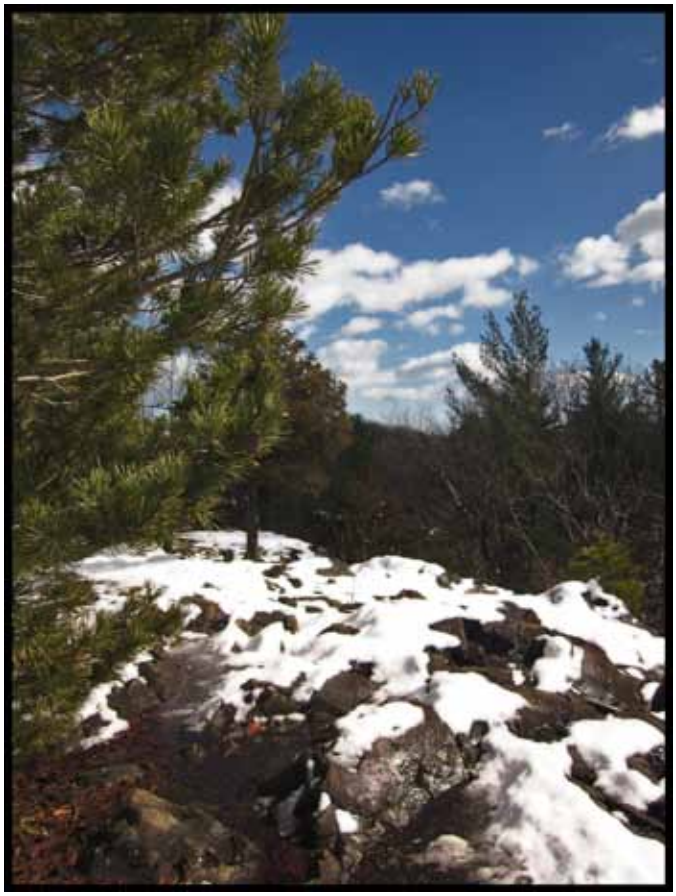
In a sunny waste of stones I climb
Toward rocky outposts of the soul.

Falcons flash among high crags above;
Between bold outthrusts of boulders
A flight of doves swoops, floats, and
rolls

Ice falls crest on frozen rock waves;
Icier winds seeming polar blown
Clutch my throat.

Blazing haze at the crest;
I smile in wind's fanged teeth.

* * * * * *



Nathan D. Horowitz

The Multicolored People of God

[Travel Journal]

Over breakfast we looked through Dave's *Field Guide to the Birds of Colombia*. Joaquín pointed out the bird I'm named after, the *toanké*—the lineated woodpecker, *Dryocopus lineatus*. Later, Joaquín said, "So, who is this girlfriend of yours?"

I rattled off, "She's an English teacher from the USA, extremely pretty, worked in Asia, now in Africa, has green eyes like me, is eight years older than I am."

Joaquín whooped. "Pounding on dead wood! *That's* how you getting the name Woodpecker!"

The others laughed as heat rose in my face. I thought defensively of how pliant and lively she is, and about the time she got me high and blew me—which, truthfully, somewhat outweighed my current embarrassment.

I'm ready to be celibate for as long as I need to. All the same, it feels safe to be in a relationship. Somebody out there loves me and thinks of me. But while Joaquín doesn't say it directly, he thinks it's a bad idea for me to be involved.

* * *

The roof of the community center, a.k.a. Joaquín's hut, is half-finished. The framework of poles and scaffolding is made of the trunks of tall, straight, slender trees. Tied to this framework—with ya'i vines that we'd previously collected, soaked in water, and split in half lengthwise—is an ever-expanding and -rising patch of overlapping palm fronds.

We rode down the river in Joaquín's new dugout canoe, with its 25-horsepower Yamaha outboard motor that he and Dave co-own. We hiked back into the forest on a broad, muddy trail, then onto a narrower trail that led to a grove of the right kind of palm trees. Dave said there are 118 known species of palms in Ecuador, and this kind of roof can be made with the fronds of only one of them.

I'm better at working with the axe now. I hold on loosely so my hands don't blister. Even my aim has improved.

We cut down ten trees with an axe whose handle Joaquín had made. In a region whose population is skilled with machetes, axe heads are sold without handles. The hard part is getting the head to stay on the handle. This one's held on by wooden wedges, but still tends to fly off.

After felling each tree, we chopped off the three-meter fronds with machetes.

As sweat poured off me, I pored over the slide show of memories of this brief, intense relationship with Ricki. Her silver rings and green eyes—or was it the other way around? Our first coffee together in the Café Trieste. Our final smooch goodbye. I investigated each memory, weighing, smelling, tasting, contemplating.

* * *

During a break, Dave remarked, "A few months ago, in San Pablo, there was a Lakota-style sun dance ceremony run by this Mexican Aztec dude, Carlos Cuitláhuac."

"I know that name! He's the enemy of this other Mexican shaman called Nezahualcoyotl. The guy whose sun dance I went to."

"Why are they enemies?"

"In '92," I said, "Cuitláhuac took over this project Nezahualcoyotl had, a dual-start relay run from Alaska and Argentina, meeting in Teotihuacan on Colombus Day. It was to commemorate five hundred years of resistance to European colonization. 'The Journeys for Peace and Dignity,' they called it. Cuitláhuac rustled the project away from Nezahualcoyotl! Least, that's what I heard."

"Cuitláhuac doesn't have a great reputation around here," Dave said. "The people who did the sun dance in San Pablo were mostly Mestizos from Quito, and the Secoyas were like, 'What the hell are these people doing, bleeding on our land?'"

We stopped in late afternoon, having laid the palm fronds in piles, and headed out. On the way, we met a colonist from the coast named Gervasio, not to be confused with the other Gervasio, the brother of Joaquín's daughter-in-law Katia. This Gervasio was riding on a chestnut mare to drag our fronds to the top of a bluff overlooking the riverbank, as Joaquín and Dave had hired him to do.

* * *

After dinner, before withdrawing to Rufino's house, where he shares a room with Maribel, Joaquín issued an edict: "Not telling each other your visions. Learning *yagé*, people getting envious of each other's visions. Not telling. That's how it is."

Afterwards, Ryder said, "Joaquín said we shouldn't tell each other our visions 'cause somebody might get jealous?"

Dave nodded. "That's what he said."

Ryder knit his brows. "Why would that happen?"

Dave leaned forward, earnest, his elbows on his knees. "The Secoyas believe visions are real! When you see a powerful vision, it's not some random thing that happens in your brain. It's the result of your *strong* physical and mental preparation, and it's because some *high, proper* spirits decide to hang out with you and show you some things. Other people might get jealous of that.

"Don Joaquín told me one time that one of the biggest challenges for the youth when they're starting to drink is they have to overcome the belief that they're super-powerful, super-enlightened, wiser than everybody else."

I said, "That makes sense. I've had that kind of thinking myself a couple times. I thought I was a prophet or the messiah. Fortunately, I'm not."

"I don't know, Toanké," said Mark, scratching his chin. "We could use a messiah around here to help with the roof."

"In that book," I said, indicating *El bebedor de yajé / Raíz de medicina* on top of my stepdad's 40-year-old olive-green army duffel bag, "there's, like, one-upmanship among shamans. The question comes up, 'Who has *really* seen God?' Francisco says, 'I went higher than any of those people around here who take themselves for witches. They thought they saw God, but what they really saw was the shining of God's furniture!' Then the Evangelical

missionaries from the United States came. Francisco says, 'I never argued about God with them. How could I? They'd never even *seen* God! They'd only *read* about him!'"

Ryder said, "What book is that?"

I said, "The autobiography of Maribel's brother Francisco. He was the last shaman-chief. He died two years ago. A Catholic priest organized his grandsons to interview him and then turned the material into a book."

"Did you know Francisco?"

"No. He was still alive the first time I was here, but I didn't go to San Pablo, where he lived."

"Well, I don't see why any of us would get envious of each other's visions."

Dave said, "We should follow Joaquín's advice anyway, because he's a high, proper master of this stuff. Just like when he told us not to eat food prepared by menstruating women."

Ryder shook his head. "I don't get that either."

"He says the energy from menstruation is deadly to *yagé* visions. And when you're drinking *yagé*, you're in a *super*-sensitive state. He says you can get *severe nosebleeds* from menstruation energy. And when you drink, you see this *rain of blood* and you lose all your visions!"

"Damn."

There was a long pause.

Mark said, "The other night, in the ceremony, you guys were singing, 'One love is high,' and 'Every rainbow has a skull for a head.' That must've been stuff you were singing last year when you drank together, right?"

Dave said, "Yeah, that was from then. We drank wicked hard, two nights in a row. One *super-incredible* thing was how Nate predicted Jerry Garcia's death!"

"I did what?"

"You don't remember that? Well, you know he'd been having health problems for a long time, and one of those nights, you said, 'I bet Jerry Garcia has finally died.' When I got to Quito, I found out it was true!"

"I have no memory of that. You sure I said that?"

"*Absolutely,* Nate. You *definitely* said that."

"Weird. I thought I remembered everything about those nights."

Maybe Dave imagined it. But he sounded so sure.

* * *

Joaquín, Dave, Ryder, Mark, and I motor-canoed back to the palm tree place. Gervasio had dragged the thirty or forty fronds from where we cut them to the top of a bluff high above the riverbank. We shouldered the fronds, four at a time, two over each shoulder, holding the thickest part of them and letting them drag behind us. The part that trailed on the ground both slowed and stabilized us, and we leaned forward and ran with them down the steep, muddy slope.

Piled them in the canoe. Motored them back to Joaquín's. Dragged them up the trail to the yard beside the hut-in-progress. With a machete, sliced the leaves on one side of the stem so they were loosely connected and folded them over the leaves on the other side. Passed the frond up to somebody else who tied it, stem up, all the leaves hanging down, at the top edge

of the partly-built roof. Tied it with single knots, snugly but not too tight, with ya'i vines.

At the end of the day, Joaquín said, *"¡Muy bién, batallón!"*

* * *

The first story in *El bebedor del yajé* tells the origin of the name Secoya. A long time ago, looking for a new place to settle, some people from the Piaguaje clan entered an area where all the plants were brilliantly multicolored. The Piaguajes went further and found people who wore brilliantly multicolored tunics, and face and body paint. The Piaguajes asked, "Who are you? What tribe are you from?"

"We're Ñañë Siecopai̲, God's Multicolored People."

"Can we stay here?"

"Yes, but don't come too close. The smell of your women's menstruations will bother us. We're from the sky and our women don't have that sickness."

The Piaguajes went back and led more of their group near where the Ñañë Siecopai̲ lived. They cleared land and planted gardens. Later they returned to their home village to collect everything they needed to resettle. But when they went again to their new location, the people from the sky had vanished, and their multicolored plants had withered. The Piaguajes decided to stay there anyway, near the river they called Siecoya, Multicolor River, because it was a holy place.

When the missionaries from the States came, they asked those Piaguajes who they were, and the reply was, "We're the people of Siecoya." That's how the name began.

Francisco relates myths, legends, and histories, and then goes into the story of his apprenticeship. His father was the shaman-chief of a group of families and wanted Francisco to follow in his footsteps. The boy's first ceremony took place when he was about twelve. He and a friend were both drinking for the first time. They decorated themselves with fine necklaces and crowns, and feathers in their ears. When they drank, the other boy vomited immediately, but Francisco didn't. He slept for some hours, then woke up and vomited.

At sunrise, he went down to the river, defecated, and cleaned his teeth. Then he climbed onto a log sticking up out of the river. Peering down through the water to the riverbed, he saw what looked like a house with a roof made of water lilies.

When he went back up to the ceremonial lodge, his father told him, "You're going to drink again tonight."

Francisco said, "Tonight I'd be afraid to, but next time, I will."

Soon he was drinking not only with his own family, but also with other families in the area. He planted his own *yagé* and *yagé ocó*. The culmination of his apprenticeship occurred when he drank *pehí*, a preparation of *floripondio,* the local *Brugmansia* / jimson weed / datura variant, stronger than *yagé*. The taste was so bad that when Francisco gulped it down, he immediately puked—catching the liquid in a gourd so he could drink it down again.

Soon, he felt as if his whole body was getting hit with burning logs. His body seemed to catch fire and burn to ash. Then his soul was free to rise to the sky. A *ma'temo pai̲*, a sky person or celestial being, led him on a tour of the upper world and the farthest edges of the earth, before bringing him to God. God lived in a hut. Half of the hut was God's, while the other half belonged to God's wife, Repao. God gave Francisco some salt to eat, salt being the symbol of healing. Francisco thus became a healer. Then God told Francisco it was time for

him to go home, adding, "Now you, too, are God."

Meeting God has now become my goal. Evidently, that's how a shaman graduates here. Francisco's book clarifies the tradition. Joaquín doesn't tell us much theory. He gives us leadership, training, rules, visions, *yagé*, and space to do our work.

* * *

We went and cut more palm trees for the roof. On the way back, we picked up doña Maribel from her *chacra*. That's a Quichua word meaning a garden or small field. We helped her carry yuca and plantains down the cliff to the boat. Back near her old house, her grandson Fermín had just shot a deer. A couple hours later, Joaquín called us over for venison in a sauce of chili pepper and onion.

I'd been wishing all day that my parents would get back together. I discussed it after dinner with Joaquín, side by side, reclining in opposite directions in his hammock. His verdict: "If your mom not wanting to go back to your dad, you can living here in Ecuador, being a good shaman." I might do that.

Now, at dawn, I just smashed a scorpion with my college copy of *The Odyssey*. Another reason to read classical literature.

My forearm's tender and swollen from stumbling against a tree with broad, sharp thorns all up its trunk. Dave says the thorns probably evolved as protection against giant ground sloths. Once the sloths went extinct, the trees kept the thorns out of sheer badassery.

Mark and Ryder are fishing for catfish while the river's low. Dave just went down to join them and wash some of his clothes. I'm in Mark's hammock, determined to draw a few more feet of ink out of this pen.

A bright call of *"¿Ñata wajë?"* and Joaquín appears, flashing a gap-toothed grin. He's wearing a green tunic, black baseball cap (*Yo Soy El Mejor,* it says, "I Am The Best," above a picture of a rooster), eight or nine bead necklaces, leather bag for shotgun shells, shotgun, and bead bracelets.

What are we going to do today? we wonder, awaiting his directions.

He sits down with a knife and a meter-long length of vine in our kitchen and rasps *yocó* for all of us to drink. This is a wild vine rich in caffeine. He scrapes off a thin layer of gray bark, then scrapes handfuls of the dark orange phloem layer into a gourd with water. He squeezes the shavings a few times, tosses them into the grass beside our kitchen, and shares around the cold reddish liquid that buzzes, bitter like dandelion milk.

"My leg and back hurting a lot yesterday," Joaquín tells us. "A Quichua witch hitting me with a *chontapalo*."

"A *chontapalo*?" I echo.

"A magic dart," Dave says. "*Chontapalo* means a spine from a chonta palm tree, but people use it as a word for a witchcraft dart."

Joaquín says, "Doctor in Lago saying I have sciatica, nerve problem, from many years lifting and carrying. But he not knowing."

I keep my skepticism to myself. Joaquín sees it in my eyes but doesn't mention it. I can see him thinking: *City people have no idea about witchcraft. And when they come to you for knowledge, half your job is convincing them that any of this is real.*

* * *

Rufino's due to arrive from Lago today. His son Luis left a line in the river last night and pulled out a three-foot catfish at seven this morning. Mark had already reeled in a smaller one at six. Thunder rumbles. The wind chime chimes. Chickens forage in our organic trash. A bird chortles while another coos urgently. *What do they know?* Ryder's cooking. Mark's dozing with a fever. Dave's clearing brush away from the trail to the river.

I just finished digging an outhouse pit that I'd started yesterday. That was satisfying work. It ended up being something I could stand inside, a small, quiet room with walls of clay and sand. It wasn't like the jobs I've done and been paid for. Washing dishes was Sisyphean: no matter how many I washed, they kept on coming back dirty. The Café Trieste featured an endless ebb and flow of customers and cappuccinos. And teaching has no visible results at all.

What about healing? That, you'd see. But why does Mark have a fever if Joaquín's a healer? Two years ago, Joaquín told me after I'd drunk fifteen nights of *yagé*, I'd be able to cure any illness. But I've drunk twelve nights so far, and while I've learned to sing and play the *mamecocó*, I doubt I can cure anything at all.

While I was digging the pit, Rufino's oldest son Fermín wandered by. "So, Toanké," he said, "there are Christians, and Jews, and what else?"

"Let me think." I put down the shovel and leaned against the sandy wall of the hole, in Fermín's shadow. The sun made a halo around his young, wise head. I should be able to answer this. I minored in religion. "There's Muslims, who are like Jews and Christians, but have a different prophet. And there's Hindus, who believe there's not just one God, but millions of them. And Buddhists. They don't believe in any God at all."

"No God at all?"

"Right. Buddhism was started by a guy named Siddhartha Gautama. Later, people called him Buddha. He lived in a place called India, in Asia—near China, where Kung Fu comes from. Buddha lived about six hundred years before Jesus. He was born a prince. His parents had gotten a prophecy that he would either be a great king or a wise man. They wanted him to be a king, so they didn't let him see anything that might make him have deep thoughts or wonder about life and death.

"But he snuck out one day with a friend, and saw an old person, a sick person, and a dead person. He said, 'What are these?' His friend explained. So Buddha decided to leave home and become a holy man and find what existence was all about. Back then, holy men fasted to attain wisdom. He tried it, and he did it really hard. He got so skinny he could touch his spine through his belly. But he didn't figure anything out. Later, he tried just meditating, sitting and focusing on his breathing, and it came to him in a burst of light. After that, he taught other people, who studied with him like we study with your granddad."

"What came to Buddha in a burst of light?" Fermín wanted to know, peering down at me leaning against the wall of the pit.

"The truth about all existence," I answered, squinting up at his dark silhouette haloed against bright blue sky.

"Yeah, but what was the truth he figured out?"

I was stumped. I scratched my head. "Sorry, I can't remember. Something about illusion."

Fermín wandered off again, taking my shade with him. I got back to work, wondering about Buddhism. I'd studied it in college, but forgotten its crucial message. *What happened to that memory? Did a mind-osprey catch it? Did it swim away?*

* * *

Rufino arrived home, a brilliant, toothy smile plastered on his face. Whatever he'd been doing, it had gone well. We all feasted on catfish soup with chili peppers and yuca flatbread at the family hut where I lived last year, now inhabited by Joaquín, Maribel, and sometimes Rufino, Katia, and their kids.

Mark's fever broke in the early morning hours. He's crashed out again, toes-up in a hammock. Joaquín's weaving a basket of ya'i vines. Ryder's shirtless, with his back to me so the splendid, whirling, blue-green Chinese dragon tattoo is clearly visible. He's adjusting a bead bracelet he made for Dave; he made it too big. Dave's writing; sitting behind him, I can see his elbow jerking, hear his hand sliding across the paper.

A white hen with three brown chicks forages inside the provisional hut, which is technically not permitted, but nobody wants to traumatize the young ones by chasing them out. Their dad's probably the ass-kicking dominant male whom Joaquín named Fujimori after the Peruvian dictator. Anyway, the mother chicken just browsed through the hut eating bugs, then pooped outside. That's what we like.

We're planning a trip into Lago Agrio tomorrow, all of us but Mark, who's going to keep an eye on the place. You can't lock a house with no walls.

Lago's the first town on the way back to Quito, an oil town, thirty years old, 30,000 people, 260 kilometers north of Coca, from where I visited the Waoranis.

Dave is "stoked"—his word—about going to Lago, because he wants to go to the town jail and talk with the prisoners about Taoism. Like a missionary.

Sometimes I think Dave's crazy.

Sometimes Dave thinks I'm crazy too.

* * *

I'm trying to figure out whether to break up with Ricki or not. Now's a good time to decide. Maybe I'll have some mail from her waiting at the post office in Lago.

* * *

I'll phone my parents. Cash traveler's checks. Buy cooking gas. Write postcards. Eat city food. But not in restaurants where we can't see who's cooking. We're following the irrational, sexist, offensive, mysterious, time-honored traditional taboo against food that may have been prepared by menstruating women.

* * *

A head shorter than me, barrel-chested, with short-cropped black hair graying at the temples, gap-toothed, the skin on his arms still smooth but loosening with age; wearing multicolored bead necklaces over his pink tunic, and black rubber boots, and that "*Yo Soy El Mejor*" rooster cap—Joaquín was strolling with me to the family hut from Rufino's house when he stopped abruptly and pointed off to the left. "In that hollow tree," my teacher said, "a nest of baby parrots. You hearing them?"

I saw the tree he meant, eight or ten meters away. Though I listened hard, I couldn't distinguish the peeps of the chicks within the volume of sound that was being emitted by so

many individual organisms from so many species. Joaquín's ears were taking in the same sound waves as mine were, but his brain had every bit of them mapped out.

* * *

It rained hard all night and morning, only letting up at noon. At 1:15, under a low sky, we headed upriver in Joaquín's canoe. Dave was the *puntero*, perching cross-legged on the prow, watching for submerged logs. Ryder and I sat on a bench behind him, Maribel behind us, the wind playing in her long, black hair. Wearing shorts and a t-shirt instead of a tunic, Joaquín perched on the left edge of the canoe next to the stern, where he could reach behind him and steer the outboard motor.

When we got on land at Chiritza, a crowd was gathered around a wooden cage with a tigrillo inside. The animal had been trapped and was going to be sold in town someplace. It was twice the size of a house cat, and spotted like a jaguar.

As we approached, a Mestizo man kicked the cage, the tigrillo snarled, the man laughed. A current ran through us gringos. I stepped between the man and the cage, my back to him, and said loudly in English, "I FUCKING HATE WHEN PEOPLE MISTREAT ANIMALS." My meaning was clear. We were fit, and bigger than these guys anyway. Dave and Ryder behind me like two chess pieces guarding a third, the man scooted away.

We finagled a ride to Lago in the back of an oil company pickup, sitting atop a load of medicinal vines called *uña de gato*, cat's claw. Got into town at seven. Slept in bunk beds in the common sleeping area of the headquarters of the *Fondo Ecuatoriano Populorum Progressio*, FEPP, a Catholic organization that trains people in agriculture and job skills.

This morning, Ryder and Joaquín and Maribel went shopping, Dave headed to the jail to preach Taoism, and I went to Ecuatel, the government telephone center. I waited in line for 20 minutes and then tried to call my mom. No answer. I tried my dad. He wasn't home either. I left and checked my mail at the post office.

There was a package from Ricki, postmarked Dakar, Senegal, with a letter and three novels in it: *Sophie's Choice* by William Styron, *The Mosquito Coast* by Paul Theroux, and *Buddenbrooks* by Thomas Mann. I glanced at them and found them all uninteresting for various reasons. More proof that she and I weren't meant for each other. I read her newsy, cheeky letter with a lump in my throat. I wrote back, telling her it it's over between us, because I have to stay here for as long as I need to do what I need to do, and I can't keep using her love as a crutch.

Now, though, I've thrown away that crutch and can't stand up. There's no sense in visualizing suicide, though, or imagining ripping out my heart and tossing it on one of the stinking trash fires that smolder on the acrid streets of Lago. Life will go on. Heat boils up round my eyes, but there's no sense in weeping on a street corner in a dirty Third World town, surrounded by live chickens panting and staring in the heat, squawking when they're taken out of their wire cages or moved. I just need to go solo for a while.

I'll sell myself for my organs. The money I make I'll have buried with whatever I can't sell. Because I drink almost no alcohol, my liver should be in top condition, suitable for transplanting or frying. Give my genitals to a female jaguar—Francisco says that's their favorite part of a man to eat—and donate my brain to medical researchers. Maybe they'll figure out what's wrong with me.

Vibrant sack of incandescent misery, longest human spine in town, sun-burnt neck, I

relax in front of Café D'Marco, on this sun-baked, sun-lit street, under massive white clouds.

Mutant life-form of inorganic materials inseminated by human cunning, an old, filthy Ford truck grumbles, panting, at curbside, burning gas, warming the planet.

Now that I've broken up with Ricki, all I can think about is how good she was to me.

I'm staring with great intensity, releasing lightning through my eyes from the thunderstorm in my brain. But the town fool, a crazy black clown-like deaf-mute who ambles the streets here, doesn't take me at all seriously. He actually cheered me up half a notch by greeting my abject misery with a huge, warm smile and a double thumbs-up sign.

Nice to rest the body here in this cushy chair. Clouds are everywhere but where the sun is, where I am—one of the incandescent bodies on the street, the angelic apes, the lost innocents.

* * *

After making sure there were no women cooking, Joaquín, Maribel, Dave, Ryder and I lunched at a burger restaurant. Dave had preached Taoism in the jail. Some prisoners weren't into it, but others listened closely. After the meal, Joaquín excused himself, and then came back. "Toanké, son," he said, "help me with the light in the bathroom." I went with him and solved the problem. The switch was of a kind he hadn't seen before, its movement left-to-right rather than up-and-down. Remembering the nest of baby parrots, I walked back to the table thinking how incompetent each of us is in the other's world.

* * *

Loaded with food, three novels, and a new broom, we rode a pickup truck taxi to Chiritza, boarded the canoe, and set off downriver. Sunset drew near. We glided under a monumental cloud show, gold and blue civilizations rising and falling. Then the light changed, as if God had vomited ambrosia all over the upper atmosphere, ghostly, fateful, pastel, rose, brilliant. A streak of dark blue stretched across the sky—*It's a sign,* I thought melodramatically. *I'll never see Ricki again*.

At dusk, we reached Poza Honda, a tiny port village downriver from Chiritza, similarly inhabited by colonists and connected with the road network.

Rufino was supposed to meet us here at 2 p.m. but, in true Third World fashion, he never arrived, and, of course, there's no way to get in touch with him. Ryder's going to sleep in the canoe to guard it, and the rest of us are crashing out up here in the village, in this general store / restaurant owned by a guy Joaquín knows.

Dave and Maribel are preparing a chicken dinner in the kitchen. As they took it in there, the chicken was squawking, "Help! Help! Help!" in chicken language, pleading for its life—way more panicked than the dismal, resigned chickens on the street corner in Lago earlier today that made me feel lucky only to be heartbroken.

Things could be worse. I could be a chicken.

But we die like chickens anyway. I suspect the gods of raising us for food.

There was something else I wanted to write in here, but I forgot what it was while I was losing a game of pool to Dave on a scrappy table under a bare light bulb, surrounded by the inevitable asteroid cloud of bugs.

I'm sitting in a rickety chair, right leg crossed over left, watching insects fly crazily under a different light bulb.

I'm going to hate the next two weeks until Ricki gets my letter. The universe keeps sending me potential wives, and I keep sending them away. Eventually it'll stop sending them. I'll die without having married or reproduced.

Why did you never settle down? people will ask.

I was too crazy, I'll answer. *I kept hopping like a flea from woman to woman, until they stayed away from me.*

A bug bounces off my leg, rattling oddly as it flies. That's how I feel—like a bug bouncing off the leg of a giant. Like the bug, I rattle as I fly, transparent wings covered in scribbles of my own devising. Landing, I scrawl words in the dirt with one claw, then, with my suction cup mouth, blow on them—*Kshhhhh! Kshhhhh!*—till they levitate into the celestial abyss of the sky. Smiling trustingly at the heaven-void, the multi-sky, your humble scribe inscribes, describes, prescribes, proscribes. And the darkness blooms with plant-like, jewel-like words.

But I think of the women I've failed at loving, and my heart is a blue crystal shattering from within; my body, an exquisite corpse weeping molten lead. My fingernails are Plexiglas, my skin a blank page, my eyes brimming bowls of chicken soup, my tongue a prehensile strawberry. When I smile, it's the opening of an oyster. When I yawn, legions of angels catch it and yawn in eighteen universes to my right, and legions of devils catch it and yawn in eighteen universes to my left. When I walk, I hold still and a giant ball rolls beneath my feet. As Dave says, the best ambition is not to have an ambition. What kills me will make me stronger.

* * * * * *

Raymond Soulard, Jr.

Notes from New England

"Please accept this ragged purse
of high notes."

The following continues the series originally called Notes from New England*, begun in issue 24-25 (Winter 1998), then revived in issue 59 (October 2006) as* Notes from the Northwest*, & appearing since issue 75 (October 2010) under its original title. It is intended as a gathering-place for observations of various lengths upon the world around me. It will be culled, like much of my writing, from my notebooks, & perhaps these thoughts will be expanded upon sometimes as well.*

Dream Raps, Volume Seven

Ink, you enchant me,
drop by drop,
holding the traces of my sanity and my madness,
like a long, barely-visible scar,
while the body sleeps in the discourse of its destructions.

— Pablo Neruda, "The Blow," 1969 (Translation by NDH)

I Never Wanted to Buy New Clothes Anyway

Anyway, it's kind of like I never wanted to buy new clothes anyway. So you could say I got what I deserved that day when I walked into the clothing store, & it got held up by these strange robbers you couldn't possibly imagine. One was very short with a long coat covered in epaulets, handlebar mustache, some kind of pirate's hat, & the other one was even stranger, even shorter, she looked like a tiny little black and white pandy bear—

And I don't even know if they were *actually* holding up the clothing store. It seemed to be some kind of confusion with the guy behind the counter, who looked like he was smoking some of that wacky green stuff day & night (by his red-rimmed eyes & his mad **CACKLE! CACKLE! CACKLE!)** begging: *don't rob us please, don't rob us please* **(in a weird sort of upside-down accent, like he was speaking backwards)**.

I don't think they were robbing them, but it got confused, & finally someone pushed down a rack of clothes, & someone hit the lights, & I just decided *the hell with buying new clothes today, I never wanted to buy new clothes anyway—who cares what my roommates think of me—*

So I managed to crawl into the back room, & out the emergency exit—*whoop! whoop! whoop! whoop! whoop! whoop!* went the alarm, but I just kept going & I found myself at a crowded train station pretty quickly, & I thought, *well, in the movies, the guy who is fleeing the scene of whatever always runs down those stairs into the train station, leaps the turnstile, & then the door to the train opens just in time, or not just in time, depending on whether or not he's going to get caught, according to some script or other—*

I missed it, of course, & now I stand there, & the platform's empty, which I find really strange.

But you know, here's the thing, I looked way down the track, & see two individuals sitting at a card table, & it's the robbers & they're sitting there, & they're playing cards. An empty can of Gin-Ginger Ale next to each of them—

Now I walk down there, & nod to them, & they don't know who I am, & they're not paying attention because they're engrossed in their card game. They're playing with a card deck that has different sizes of cards, & different shapes of cards, & some of the cards are thick, & some are thin, & I notice the bigger of the two with the mustache actually starts to chew on a couple because perhaps they are tasty cards too, at least some of them—&, well, they just look too busy for the likes of me, so I figure, *well, maybe it's the fact that I didn't buy new clothes—look at the rags upon my back!*

So I walk to the far end of the platform thinking, *eh, I'll stay way down here,* & I start to think about my expenses, & the reason why I didn't want to buy new clothes is that I owe a lot of rent, & I don't have a lot of money. Old-timey bookstore jobs just don't pay well, & I spend too much time composing poems with sand-sticks in the earth.

But then again, I thought, *if I get a new job with new clothes, maybe I'll be able to pay rent, or just move out of that place anyway. My room doesn't even have a real door, just a kind of a courtesy curtain as they call it. Courtesy curtain!*

So what happens finally is I just sit down on the platform, I think to myself, *go don't go, what difference does it make?*

Then a man comes up to me, & it's the clothing shop owner, but he looks all mod now. His hair's slicked back, & his clothes are far more expensive & fancy & weird than the ones that were for sale in his store. And he says to me, *dreams are just fragments of reality* (**CACKLE! CACKLE! CACKLE!**)*, or like tiny bits of unchewed food*.

* * * * * *

Some Will Not Like How This Story Continues

Some will not like how this story continues, but this is how it continues. I was waiting for a bus at a street corner after my latest shift at the old-timey bookstore, & the bus pulled up, & the door opened, & I got on board, & I paid my fare from a little blue-green coin purse. And look who is driving—but none other than ex-President Clusterfuck himself, Donald J. Trump!

Yes indeed, he's the driver. He's dressed up in a driver's uniform, & he kind of looks like Ralph Kramden from that old TV show, *The Honeymooners.* He has the hat, he has the formal jacket & the pants, & he's friendly to everybody. He's talkative, having a good time driving the bus.

I sit way in the back, but I can hear his voice booming in the front. People get on, people get off. A lot of people sit toward the front because he's telling funny stories. Apparently, years after he was driven from the White House in Washington D.C., he lived in the outback of Australia for awhile, lived with the kangaroos. Named them too, some ribald names. Stinky, Swallers, Big Mama.

I had me some funny names for them kangaroos that I lived with out in the outback, all alone. Just me & the kangaroos! he cries, & the bus shakes with everyone's laughter.

So I'm sitting there listening, but eventually my attention drifts to my feet, my boots. They've fallen apart, I can barely walk in them. Sometimes I forget this for a while, but then they sort of come undone, & they're flapping in a way that feet don't like. Now I'm thinking: *I've gotta go see someone*.

So I get off the bus near the Square, because I see a sign for a certain shop that says: **Shoe Fix-er! Shoe Fix-er!** It's a funny sign & I think *OK, I'll go to the* **Shoe Fix-er! Shoe Fix-er**!

I wave goodbye to ex-President Clusterfuck, Donald J. Trump the bus driver, & he says, *you take care, my brother, peace & love to all & yours.* I say, *you too, ex-President Clusterfuck, Donald J. Trump*.

I get off the bus, & I sorta waggle-waddle-limp my way to **Shoe Fix-er! Shoe Fix-er**! Inside is a man sitting on a little stool. He's a blonde man with a very intense look on his face, but I've come to

realize that's just how he looks even when he's calm.

I say, *aren't you that famous ex-movie star*? And he looks at me with that fierce look & he says, *yes sir, I am that famous ex-movie star, but this is what I do these days.* So I take off my boots, & he starts to fix them.

He looks at me quietly a long while, & says, *how are those sessions you're having with Webster Hill?*

Um. I ask him, *Who is Webster Hill?*

He says, *why, he's your psychiatrist. He's the one you write about in all your journals, & you haven't decided yet if he's a man or a place, you haven't decided whether you're sane or not sane.*

Tell me, sir, look at me in my fierce & famous ex-movie-star eyes, is all that you've told about in the last few minutes real? Does it sound real, or is it just some kind of a weird dream?

* * * * * *

I Have This Teacher That I Admire a Lot

I have this teacher that I admire a lot. My class with him is at night, the one weekday night the old-timey bookstore gives me off, & I wish I could have a drink with him, or something, pick his brain about all my worries & thoughts about the world, & whatever. That's his phrase, he likes to talk about *the world, & whatever*.

But I don't want to take up his time, so I ask him, as he's packing up his knapsack, *how long is your drive home?* He says, *oh, about 90 minutes.* He's all packed up, & sees I'm lingering. He's smaller than me, only in stature, & he leans near to me, & kisses me on the shoulder, quickly, affectionately, & then he leaves without a word.

I feel touched specially, sweetly, & so I walk home. It's a long way, & I have lots of time to think about this & that. I look up at the stars, & sort of bounce them around in my mind, & I remember that time I traveled down south to the Free City of Mumakesh. I ended up at a brand-new bookstore, a tall glass structure, with bookstalls outside, & cups of wine & juice available freely. Inside there was so much to see. Very mazy, vast & wonderful.

As I'm walking through the complex array of aisles, I realize I'm naked. But nobody troubles about me, nobody criticizes or gives me a hard time. Someone shouts to me from a distance, *hey Websta'! You'll love their LPs!* And the vinyl LP section *is* a good one. Three different colored vinyl versions of James McGunn's *Sco'u'tland.* There's an old portable phonograph to play records on if you're careful.

So that is the story I thought about as I was walking home with my teacher's affectionate kiss still on my shoulder, still hovering like a feather, like a whisper.

* * * * * *

In a New Century

In a new century, the bald angry man pulls open his shirt to reveal a superhero's picture on his chest. But at that moment, a woman much taller than him is burying him in popcorn. She's probably three times taller than him, an aberration of the new century. As the popcorn buries him almost completely, you can hear him cry from deep in his superhero-picture-covered chest, *you can't bury me, oh!*

What the hell was that? Oh, here now. Look around. There's a Ducky Creature, sitting peaceably in the lap of my new beloved, by the shore of the magickal mythical Island. They look quite peaceable together.

But then, at that moment, comes roaring up a big & metallic machine, intent on getting them

& everyone else off this magickal mythical Island, clearing it off, sweeping it dry, everything. My new beloved & the Ducky Creature run to hide at the far end of the magickal mythical Island. She's a quick runner.

But, in the middle of the magickal mythical Island, there is a big Ducky Creature, a BIG Ducky, & he won't go. He looks at this great metallic machine approaching him, smirks friendly, & says, *we won't go, you will go*.

* * * * * *

Me Looking in a Trashcan

See me looking in a trashcan, in a bathroom, in a house I lived in back when. In the trashcan are yellow pages from my notebooks, crumpled & thrown out. Well, some of the pages are from my notebooks, some aren't, but I'm shocked. I don't know what it means. I stand up with my pages, fold them carefully, put them in my inner pocket of my green plaid jacket, & I walk out right out the door.

I find myself walking on the side of this road where they say strange things happen. At one point, I walk into a kind of a restaurant, called Blue Dog Eats, & they don't have counters or booths, they have old-fashioned school desks. I sit at one, & look at the menu, & the waitress comes over, frazzled, hurried, leaves again, not rude but just frazzled, hurried.

Someone else places an order, salmon, toast, other things, his list seems to go on & on, & how can one man even as fat as this one eat that much food? And there's no one with him to enjoy it.

Tiring, I leave, walk on, & find a stump at the side of the road to take my rest. Gather together a sharp-pointed stick, & some colored sand, & I just start to write words in the ground between my feet. Not sure how this is working, but the letters are glowing as I write them.

They almost seem to seek into the earth, become words & something else too? I feel myself slip into the sand-stick, into the sand it composes into the earth, like becoming as one thing. Man, stick, sand, earth, words . . . a *hmmm* raises & runnels through all this.

A noise, the runnel snaps. *Oh, here now.* Here in my lap is my Creature friend, MeZmer the White Bunny. A dear friend, & my Tender for times of worries & trouble. She is now wearing the beautiful necklace my new beloved put on her, & she has a bowtie too. Creatures charm with just the smallest touches.

We nap together awhile. Then I have to get back on that road. MeZmer gives me a friendly bright-eyed sniff, & is back in the White Woods in barely a hop.

I'm bound somewhere. I have friends that I'm remembering now are waiting for me down this road & they're saying, *come with us, come with us, we want to visit the Rainbow Wheel that unites the Six Islands. Come with us!*

* * * * * *

Laying Abed, Still Dark

Laying abed, still dark, it's the last little stretch of the night when it does not seem possible that there is indeed a morning coming. It is as much night as it can possibly be. And to be awake at this time, not because you stayed up all night, but because you woke just about now, is a mysterious thing indeed. Yesterday's finished & tomorrow hasn't yet begun, so it's sort of a forever now, even though it's only for a little while.

And I lie there, next to my new beloved, thinking about the ex-President Clusterfuck, Donald J. Trump, & how he hated what people said about him back then, hated all those mean nasty things, & he'd've make them all *shut the fuck up* if he could've. He really would've. Wonder what it would be have

been like to have another President after him. But we didn't. Probably for the best. And now he drives buses, smiles, & tells his off-color jokes to general delight.

It's good to be back at the old-timey bookstore, it's been a while, I'm glad they rehired me. I now work the back counter best I can. There's two registers, & always a lot of customers. They've got shopping carts full of things, like big five-pound bags of ChocoSmax, & I think: *why are people buying ChocoSmax in an old-timey bookstore? What what kind of place is this?*

I wander away for a moment, not sure why, maybe just discombobulated with the whole thing. Still thinking about ex-President Clusterfuck, & his hatred of all people *forever & ever, & he'll get them all in the end*. But now he's the happy jokester bus driver.

Watching my colleagues rush over to start attending those long lines I walked away from. And they decided maybe I can't handle them, so they settle me in with an old, old man they call Refund Man, because he comes in every day for his refunds.

He's got the frayed remains of scraggly dreadlocks, & a crushed old scrap of a weird hat, & his eyes don't really match each other in color, one green & one golden, don't seem to be either of them straight. Nose is a little bent. Did he ever smile much?

No one exactly explains to me what he gets his refunds for, but he's got to fill out the form & bring it to the front counter, where he'll get his refund.

He's got to put in his name down on the form, & he's sitting in one of the many armchairs over there in the oversized *History of the Six Islands* section, with his smells from the White Woods, & smells from the cellar of that ancient mansion he squatted in awhile. He's saying to me, *which name am I gonna put down this time*? He looks at me with his crazy green & golden eyes, & he says: *which name?*

Webster Hill? I suggest.

Starts, studies me a long moment, seems to agree, & he puts that name down, & I point him toward the front. *Events accumulate*, he mutters back at me, by obscure way of thanks.

Still night, still dark. Still forever now, for a bit longer. *Drift. Drift. Drift.*

* * * * * *

Little Bear Creature

It was a strange thing. Somehow that little Bear Creature had swallowed the original Secret Book, & some of the little Pine Cones, & he was very upset about this. We've been traveling together for a long time, a long distance, & I know this little Bear Creature does not sleep well, has troubles & worries, & so I think that this may have happened because of that. He may have sleep-swallowed the Secret Book & some of the little Pine Cones.

But what's good to tell is that eventually we work it out. *Of course* we work it out. There's no way that I, as Creature Coordinator, am not going to work out a crisis involving Creatures, especially Creatures swallowing other Creatures by accident. We call in MeZmer the White Bunny & Tender to Cluster Dream with us, & recover everyone safely. Much happiness. Much dancing.

So we continue traveling, now with the Kittees, wearing their special occasion long blue top hats, & driving their famous Boat Wagon, to another of the famous Six Islands. A big Village. Vast coffeehouse & that great new big glass-walled mazy bookstore I love. It's quite an Island, lots of fun.

I remember standing in the Square at about 2 in the morning, the Fountain shouting beautiful rainbow-colored glowing water into the air, like the Rainbow Wheel that now unites all Six Islands.

But my little Bear Creature friend still has his troubles & worries, & I think they're affecting me too because we're in a clearing that night, drifting toward sleep out under the Full Moon, & there's fog rolling across it, heavy clouds, & I look up, & see the Imp in the Full Moon. And it looks like her head's fallen off! I panic but she just laughs & laughs & laughs. Like this: **CACKLE! CACKLE! CACKLE!** And I just don't know what to do about it.

Sit up now fully awake, & I look at my also fully awake little Bear Creature friend & I say, *you know, my friend, we're worrying too much.*

Then someone in a tree nearby says: *if you worry too much, you've got to go to the Floating Island in the Sky. Wash all your cares away.*

Being trusting sorts, we ask the voice, *where is this Floating Island in the Sky that will wash all our cares away?*

Well now. The two of you go back on to sleep & I think things will take care of themselves. And there was something in that voice to trust & my friend feels it too. And so we curled up, blankets & pillows, all clustered together, good friends, fell into a Clustered Dream, *& up! & up! & up! & up!* to that Floating Island in the Sky.

And that voice was right. We returned sometime before morning, woke up in that clearing, & our worries had floated away.

* * * * * *

We All Take Buses Now

It was inevitable—we all take buses now. Nobody drives in cars alone anymore, like we used to when you'd see the highway filled with cars with one passenger in each. That's long since passed. It was the environment's crash, was always coming. Did President Clusterfuck, Donald J. Trump, listen? *Did any of them?* Now he drives an electric bus & tells dirty jokes.

I guess there's still some cars, but they have to be filled, you can't travel *anywhere* alone without risk of fine, even jail, unless your car is filled. There are no commercial planes anymore, either, those big jets that used to fly people & burn who knows how many thousands of gallons of petrol. No way. *You want to get somewhere far, you're going to be on the buses.*

It's taken awhile, whole culture changed, slowed down, probably better off for everybody. And so you get to talking to people, because what else is there to do on a bus traveling long distances, if that's what you've got to do?

I'm sitting next to this old, old man. Says his name is Hill. Crazy misshapen eyes looking around in about ten directions at once. I don't know if he's talking to me, or talking to the seat, talking to the air, talking to his memories, but he starts talking in this very soft voice.

Hill says, to whom-or-whatever: *seems long ago I was visiting this pretty girl, long dark curly hair.*

Looks at me & says, *was she Irish?* I shrug vaguely.

Hill continues: *she was sweet & intelligent, & pretty, all three. I take the big chance, & we kiss, & then there's many kisses. And I don't remember her name. Do you remember her name?*

Hill looks at me hard. I shake my head, feeling like I don't know what part I'm playing in this anyway.

And I ask if she'll be mine, if she's decided. She says, Mary Gall will decide. And I don't know what this meant, I don't know who Mary Gall was.

Long pause. Another long hard look at me.

I still don't know who Mary Gall is &, you know, I'm still waiting for Mary Gall to decide. Events accumulate.

* * * * * *

I Get Off That Bus

So I get off that bus & I'm looking for a kind of smoke shop I've been in before, a sort of magickal place I'm trying to find again. It was sort of a smoke shop, but sort of not even really a shop at all. And I'm trying to figure out where it is, & what stop did I get off at last time? I really don't know. I start walking faster & faster, like you do when you're lost, as though maybe you'll get un-lost if you walk fast enough. It just never works.

I walk into this one place, & they're selling computers from the future. Yeah, one of *those* shops. Oh, they come with all sorts of guarantees, like if you buy this computer from the future now, you'll be covered later if you arrive to a moment when in the past it was broken. *Possibly Double Your Money Back Too!* read a lot of the banners on the wall.

So I'm sitting at this computer monitor. It's not really actually a monitor, it's more like a wall, & I'm sitting there in a chair facing the wall, & there's a square like a screen drawn on the wall with a black marker pen, one of those felt kinds.

And I'm drawing on the screen with my finger, & there are others doing the same thing, drawing on the wall with their fingers, & it seems as though there's sort of a collaboration going on between us, among us, & we start drawing in synchrony, on our computer screens from the future, sort of a rhythm that becomes kind of a melody of sorts.

But then I just stand up & walk out of the computer store from the future, because I don't have time for guarantees. I'm looking for something *better than a guarantee*.

Now I'm walking down the street, having given up on the smoke shop, & given up on the computer store from the future, & I'm thinking about the idea I once read about of adding water to something to make something else. I think now maybe that's what you need in life—you need to add something to something else to produce a third thing.

And this sounds simple but, really, there's some way you can go about it where it's not simple. Like, for example, what if you didn't know one of the two things & you just sort of ad libbed, & this seems strange, because I mean, really, *you can't do that, can you?*

I don't know. I start wondering if maybe it's possible to have a big question mark plus question mark equals three. *Why not?* That's what I say. *Prove me wrong!* I declare, as I'm walking down the street waving my arms around.

But nobody cares to prove me wrong. People, in fact, only care to give me a little bit of leeway as they walk by me, seeing me wave my arms, shouting to the skies, *prove me wrong! Question mark plus question mark equals three!*

Then I just walk into this old movie theater. Well, it might be an alley, I'm not really sure. But I see this flickering screen projected on a brick wall. Maybe it's like that wall that was in the computer store from the future, I'm not really sure, but there's a movie telling a story about a leader in Russia, a popular young leader, & he & all his family are red-haired.

They're playing on the Palace lawn, & they're very popular even though they're czars & matriarchs & things like that. And there comes a Memorial Day, & the popular young leader says: *we will all now take a knee in memory*.

So I do too, standing there in that alley watching. I take a knee now in memory of all the things that have occurred to me recently. Take a knee, then sort of settle comfortably onto a flat piece of cardboard to watch more of this story.

And when I wake up, I'm on that damn spaceship overhead again.

* * * * * *

I Spent a Lot of Time on the Road

I spent a lot of time on the road back then, & most of it was boring, some of it was strange, & a small bit of it absolutely wonderful. This one time I'm traveling, I come to a sort of campsite. Even has some kind of a country store, you know those stores that sell just a little bit of everything out in the middle of nowhere at three times the regular price. Most of it's expired, but you're out in the middle of nowhere, & they're selling it.

I make a new friend. He's a nice guy. Sometimes I look at his face & he looks really young & fresh cut, right out of the grinder, & sometimes he looks like an old, old man who hasn't seen the grinder in a long *long* time. He's got a tent, I've got a tent, sort of a tent. *It's tent-ish.*

So we start gathering firewood, & I tell him about the ideas I've been coming up with over time, because he seems like the kind of guy that'd keep his ears open to such things.

So I say, *we should build a big fire, & we should maintain it always. We should draw people to it, from our travels hither & yon. We should build it big enough, & have it always going, so that the idea of it starts to infect others. They come & they visit the bonfire, & it causes them ideas. Maybe they go off & build their own bonfires!*

And he, carrying along his firewood, big armful, strong guy, he suddenly cries out, *shamans! & fire!* He cries out, *shamans! & fire! Events accumulate!* Alright, alright, I like this guy.

So I picked this small area among the trees to put up my sorta tent, & I thought it was out of the way, but it begins to fill with people who come over for various reasons. Maybe they hear about my idea, though there's no actual fire built yet, it's just an idea & a wonderful way of talking about it. *Shamans! & fire!*

And my friend, he can't keep his eyes off this long rainbow-haired hippie girl who's come over, & he's staring hard at her, though she seems nonplused, neither disturbed nor complimented. Smoking a long cigarette, I do think it's tobaccey. And we start to build the fire.

I say to the long rainbow-haired hippie girl, *come over here, help us*. She says, *sure man, sure man. You gonna build a fire?*

I look at my friend who's bashfully digging his toe in the sand, & I point at him. I nod, nod again, *here's your big shot, Romeo,* & he shouts to the sky, & to everyone, everywhere:

SHAMANS! & FIRE!

* * * * * *

Empty Playhouse

In the empty playhouse of my mind, the stage is filled with faces that never met & places that were not adjacent to one another, & moments that did not occur. And I'd like to introduce Friend A to Friend B but it would take a thousand miles & several years, some kind of temporal wire to do it. And I'd like to reach my elongated hand across to all of your hands, so long untouched, & I'd like to tug gently on those hands until they begin to arc over the mundane & the impossible both, & arrive here.

I'd say to you, & you, & you, I couldn't tell you then the words I can conjure now, how I love you, how important you were to me, how you stayed in my mind-car as it sped away, as you sped away, other directions, other places, other times, to be gone toward.

And if I could get you all on the telephone, all you faces from hither & yon, so long unseen, the old telephones with the wires attached to the wall so that we're all unable to walk outside under the stars or sit in shopping malls or pay attention to four things at the same time.

I'd say, *it's a clear moment, comin' & goin', it's a clear moment. Go to your window, look up at that Imp in the Full Moon with me now, here, there, then, wherever you are, look up at that Full Moon, I'm bouncing my kisses, my affections, my sadnesses off it, onto you. Like a feather, like a whisper.*

* * * * * *

I'm in a Bedroom in My Mother's House or Apartment

I'm in a bedroom in my mother's house or apartment, & the long dark curly-haired girl in the tight sweater comes over. It's one in the morning, but I'm sure glad to see her. I'd known her back in high school, but not really, never really looked at her.

We hug. We're supposed to work together on something. My mother's around too. I am friendly to her, but I don't really want her around. Her house or apartment is long, its hallways deliberately narrow. I like this girl a lot, try not to blow it. *Should we do our work now? Or lay close in the darkness?*

Something something. Suddenly I'm in that or another room alone, sitting in a chair, it's dim, & I turn to face the mirror. An old, old man with someone else's weird eyes, someone else's face. I cry out, terrified. *Wake up!*

Something something something. Suddenly that room or another, with someone else. We were prisoners, we'd try hard to escape using a Polaroid camera. Pictures in front of the sensors, complicated process, it may not work. It involved a map of a baseball diamond as well.

Something something something something something something something something something something something something something.

Still in her house, don't know how. Now that long dark curly-haired girl is sneaking in to leave notes on my typewriter. I don't see her anymore, but I see the notes. Don't understand it. How does this work? *How does this work?*

Finally I just move out. I just leave, walk through the door, & down the stairs, & out onto the street. I don't bring anything, I don't bring anyone, I just keep walking until I come to the White Woods.

I feel deeply bound to go to these beautiful Woods. Keep walking till I'm exhausted, & slump down against a tree. Nearly doze but then a really pretty scent wakes up my nose. Stand up, walk around this tree, & there is a woman smoking a really *really* fat marijuana joint.

We nod & smile friendly, & she says, *hey brother, wanna share a smoke?* So we start smoking, passing it back & forth, & she tells me this story, which I've never forgotten in all the years since, even if they've only been days or possibly weeks.

She says: *my grandmother, Beatrix Wordsley, ran a poor folks' clinic, late in her life, after retiring from schoolteaching, & she was being put to death as a kind of symbol of the State's power to crush anyone. It's unclear, though, that this was the actual effect. The clinic remained open. There was even a room in the clinic for selling vinyl LP records to raise money for her defense.*

And I was there, & I said to them: you gotta put posters on the walls to really attract attention & funds. My favorite was my Nana Beatrix's poster that read: Don't You Know That Dreams Are Real?

And there was this cop named Daniel, used to be a ball player when he was younger, who would help her with her clinic sometimes. He'd speak to his superiors on her behalf when needed, felt connected to her. He said he'd help protect us all, even when she's gone.

Day of her execution, he's crying, he's crying, he's crying. Big handsome man crying like his world is broken & won't be fixed no more. God damn, let's smoke another joint. Events accumulate.

* * * * * *

I am an Old Monk, in Robes & Rope

I am an old, old man, a monk, in robes & rope, looking across the street at the burnt temple. I fall to my knees, weeping, at the remains. After a long time, a car pulls up. All the holy men & their devotees come out, & they fall to their knees, & they cry together, & they say to each other, *he tried to warn us*.

Then I step forward, & they learn I broke into the temple, last night, & I took all their sacred

treasures, & I hid them away. I've made sure, however, it's seemed as though when the temple burned, *everything burned.*

One of them asks me, *what is your order?* And I reply, *one day long ago, I woke deep in the night, & I walked outside, I walked away, & I walked through the streets till I came to the edge of the Village, & I walked beyond it till I came to the brown hills, & I walked up them into the White Woods, & I had no shoes on my feet, like you see me here now, & I had on only this robe, & I left everything behind to walk into those White Woods, & I fell down to my knees that night too, & I looked up & around & I said, take me & let me be your servant. Let me serve the world. Let me help.*

I look around at all of them listening to me in their fresh grief over this violence, even though I saved their trinkets, & knew that what I saved was not what really mattered.

(*Events accumulate.)*

Then I continue to walk away.

* * * * * *

When You Travel By the Long Distance Bus

When you travel by a long distance bus, you'll meet a lot of people along the way. And, if you listen to their stories, I think your perspective of the world is going change, a little.

One time I was traveling in a very crowded long distance bus, & I sat next to an old, old man. He told that back when he was a young man, he'd lived in a cabin out in the White Woods, & every morning, when he looked out his window, he could see beyond the clearing around his cabin, up near the trees, a rainbow-colored snake.

After a while, it appeared every morning. It wouldn't stay long, but it was there. He got a pair of powerful binoculars to watch this snake from the window, so as not disturb him or threaten him or anything. He noticed that the snake when it rose up & moved, it flowed along on tiny powerful feet.

Eventually the snake noticed him, but didn't run, didn't attack &, over the course of time, approached him, a little each day, slowly, cautiously.

Now, this young man had an unusual idea of things. He thought to himself, *I wonder what that snake would eat? I wonder what I could offer that snake that he would enjoy*? And he got out of his fridge (one of those old fridges that uses ice for cooling) a little can of olives. And this old, old man told me that the young man he had been fed that snake every morning an olive. It'd curl near to him, where he sat on an old stump, to accept an olive, & to stare at him for a long moment, without chewing. Then it would retreat, still looking at him. That's what he told me. Got off at the next stop.

Then I met a child who I couldn't tell if it was girl or a boy. It was one of those pretty little things, but it was hard to say whether it was a kinda pretty girl, or a very pretty boy, dressed in shorts, a kind of uniform, smiled at me, but was mostly just talking to him/herself.

So I listened in. He/she said something like this: *I/we travel away from there, now gone deep into a cave, & beyond, & suddenly underground, now we're turning, me/her, a flashlight in my/we/our hand(s), many fairy humanoids dancing around the cave. We shine, I shine, our flashlight, & the little fairy humanoids approach me/us but they do not touch me/us, they do not do anything unusual.*

They don't speak, maybe they hmmmm a little. But there are butterflies amongst their number who emerge to nip at my/our forearm, & they nip & nip, as I/we stumble out of the caves. That was a hundred years ago, or was it a thousand?

Now there wasn't anybody on the bus for a long time, & I just sat & read. I was reading the yellow pages of my old journals, reading about times that to me almost seem like they were someone else telling me a story. *Webster Hill?*

One whole page in which I wrote from top to bottom, over & over, in increasingly smaller hand, *events accumulate events accumulate events accumulate events accumulate events accumulate events*

accumulate—

And one of them is about a dream I had in which a girl I loved a long time ago, who never really loved me all that much, was with me again. Sweet, luscious, loony Mary Gall. We were in class. Now she loved me, in this dream, too many years later to matter. And I didn't know what to say at this point. I've had this dream so often, it catches me up & scoops me in, & I wallow in it for a while, & then I wake, & then I write it down. Still unchewed bit of my past.

Far more interesting to listen to someone else's stories. So one guy finally gets on the bus & he's got long dreadlocks, & a weird hat, & his eyes don't really match each other in color, one green & one golden, don't seem to be either of them straight. Nose is a little bent. But he's got a *really really really* nice smile on his face, even if it's kind of crooked. Sits across the aisle from me, studies me somewhat crookedly with his green & golden eyes, & says, *listen man, if you travel in a book-movie-Island, at one point you'll be reading a long document about its history, & many others will be coming at you to read it.*

So you'll read it aloud, & then you'll find that you're trapped by all these people in/on this book-movie-Island. You're trapped, & events will accumulate, & you may be able to wiggle yourself free, unfold, reveal, find a way out, through the document, read your way in & around & under the document. It is many many columns long, many pages, little pictures, static, this place, events accumulate!

I'm done with stories of all kinds for now, I think. Thanks though.

* * * * * *

It Begins, Traveling Far

Again traveling far, somewhere far, like this time I'm a distance from myself even. Gray, indistinct. For a long time I don't feel the beautiful White Woods around me, & then I begin to, they begin to fill in around me, fill in within me, & I begin to walk them, gratefully, these White Woods, within & without.

And I come to a stump, somewhere in these White Woods, & it's filled with rainwater. I sit down next to it, legs crossed, watching a fair while. Seems no matter the weather, when I lean over to look within the stump, there's water inside. I see my reflection.

But then I see something else, I see a memory of a much younger me lying under a beautiful tree, decorated with shiny colored balls, & looking up at my many reflections in them.

And then deeper than these reflections, I see something else to take with me, a sort of gift, & I look into it, this gift, & what I see is that there's this woman with deep, intelligent, hurt eyes & she's a doctor. She's led her refugees for many years, traveled far & tended them, tended them much more than a medical doctor. She's been their leader.

Then what happens in this far gone place, & nameless of year & location, is that she meets the tight end, a football tight end, & she learns that there is a sort of new version of football that's come back into the world, that's sort of a new way of settling disputes between tribes. Rather than the bullets from guns that no longer fire, or the spears made from wood that no longer grows, instead they play football. Only they play for keeps, little equipment, no rules. They play it till they're done.

So he begins to travel with this woman, with her deep, intelligent, hurt eyes, & her people, & he has many skills they don't have. He knows how to find food where there seems to be none. He knows how to find water where there seems to be none. He knows how to find shade & warmth where there seems to be none.

And he's a good man, except very late at night if you don't rock him to sleep with a *hmmm,* he'll begin to talk about despots, about the leaders that brought the world to this place of grayness & yearslessness & mileslessness, & just surviving weirdly. He'll say*, deception, distraction, despair. That's what keeps people down, that's what clusterfuck despots use to keep people down. Deception, distraction, despair. That's why we're here.*

But the woman with the deep hurt eyes will eventually take him in her arms, & they'll rock together like the two closest of friends, & he will listen to her *hmmm* until he falls into a sleep of long ago, when football was a different kind of game, & he would leap through the air, & catch those beautifully thrown passes. Score & score & score & hurt nobody. *Hurt nobody*.

* * * * * *

The Muse is in the Details

I was talking to an old friend on the telephone. What I meant to say to him is that *the muse is in the details*. I think about this now, sitting in this large room, many friends, I think they're friends, they feel like friends. The room seems to tip & sway a bit at times, because it's a room somewhere deep in a big spaceship, far out in space. Maybe where the stars are even farther apart than they seem to be.

I'm a very young man & I'm in love with this new girl in the room, with long dark curly hair & dark eyes. She looks like this actress on this TV show *Trip Town* I used to watch, & in my mind anyway she loves me too. But that's how I suppose everyone operates these days. When there isn't much, you imagine the bread in your hand is a feast; you imagine meeting eyes with another fellow refugee has meaning in it; you just reach out to a paltry world & *whatever, whatever, whatever* there is, you magnify it. Give you a little something more than the less you're used to,

The ship rocks again. There's benches around the walls in this room, & there's benches in the middle, & people are tightly close together. I think we're all friends, refugees, prisoners, hard to tell where we're from, or where we're going, different places. People come & go randomly, without explanation. Like they melt into or out of the existing fact of being in this room.

At one point the ship rocks hard, & I tip into her, & I feel so embarrassed because this is something beyond what's gone on in my mind, sweet, & doesn't involve my shoulder leaning into her roughly.

And then later on the ship rocks the other way, & she leans into me, but it's *so* soft, it's like having a feather lean into you, or a whisper in your ear, or something like that. It's just the opposite, & I hold her in my arms for just an elongated moment beyond when the ship has stabilized again, & she doesn't push away immediately.

We know there's nothing to come of this, of any of this. We're friends only in that we're being transported from one dark place to another. But it's a long trip, & I think that even though we separate again, after that elongated moment, it's enough to feed my mind, & maybe hers, for a little way anyway, as the ship travels on. I almost dare to hope it will rock again, & neither of us will melt.

* * * * * *

Old Beautiful Green Couch

My father & I sit together on an old beautiful green couch & I describe to him how my beloved tends to my wounded toe. Medicines, scrapings, bandages. He listens with that kind of attention I know means there is one of us present, we're speaking & listening as one.

But then the lights go out, & I guess I must fall asleep. I wake up on that old beautiful green couch, & he's gone, but there's a beautiful brown blanket on me. He covered me before he left. It's a brown blanket, very soft, covered in beautiful brown Creature Bear faces. I feel like they're looking at me with that same kind of attention that he gave me, concern, love, focus. *I'm not alone.*

* * * * * *

A Variety of Cheeses

It seemed to be a huge, un-sleek spaceship, not the kind you would have seen in those fancy moving pictures back when, nope.

While I was on the spaceship, I was given a cup & I was told to masturbate into it &, as an incentive I was offered a variety of cheeses from a small fridge to help.

I don't think I'd ever been incentivized like that before to do such a thing. I managed to slip out the door &, since it was a big ship, I just started running & running & running. I'm not a fast runner, nor a particularly graceful runner, but I kept running. When you've got a choice between running & masturbating for the incentive of a variety of cheeses, you run & you run & you run.

Eventually I ran out of spaceship to run through. I ran right up into the White Woods, or that's what they looked like anyway. I say *up* because, when I briefly looked back, I saw that I had come from a spaceship mostly buried in the earth.

Very strange trees, glowing in that subtle way that they do in these White Woods, where I'd been many times before. Finally I stopped, breathing heavy, pretty much collapsed on the ground, sat under a tree. I would've kept crawling if they were still been following me, with their masturbatory cup, unfilled, & variety of cheeses. Nobody was following me.

But then I saw next to me, & it didn't feel like a coincidence, but maybe it was, I don't know, a thick leather book. And, on the other side of me, another thick leather book. I'd somehow sat down heavily, practically collapsed, between two leather books. Something etched in gold on each of their covers, but so faintly I can't make out the letters. *M-?-?-R-O-?-I-E?*

And then I felt under myself, *good golly*, there's a thinner book, it was taller, less elaborate than the other two. I looked inside this one, & it looked like more of a key? *Possibly?* Well, OK, so this is better than the alternative, I guess.

And you're going to wonder, *what was in those books*? And you're going to wonder, *did I start reading them? Did the key help? Did I really ever get off that spaceship?* These are some *good* questions.

* * * * * *

In My House Alone, & It's Night

In my house alone, & it's night, & I'm listening to the noises & the creakings. There's a moment of stillness, & then suddenly police pour through the door, hold me down, & accuse me of seventeen different sins. I shake my head no seventeen times &, upon the seventeenth shake of my head, I find myself in another house, & there's my father looking at me with great concern because my mother wants to throw me out, possibly for my seventeen different sins. He promises to help.

Later, I see my buddy, the poet footballer, & I ask him to put in a good word for me with her. I feel lost, hunted, paranoid, & I keep wondering, *which seventeen different sins am I guilty of?*

I finally walk out. *I've had it.* I walk straight down the middle of the street. *Let them run me over, let them bring me down, I don't care anymore. I'm done.*

And I come upon an old, old man approaching me, wearing ragged dreadlocks under a weird ragged hat. He's also in the middle of the street, & he has the same crazy desperate look I have on my face. We're like mirror images of each other, & he puts his hands on my shoulders, & I can see that his eyes are two beautiful colors, one green & one golden.

He looks me crookedly deep in my eyes, hands on my shoulders & he says, *the world is one boat for all, & there are two choices. A stateless village of neutral support for all, or the coming corporate slave state in which government has been withered in favor of competing & cooperating corporate entities whose alliances form regions of power, & whose companies control the weapons, the food, the utilities, & the transit.*

My friend, there will be three classes, the super-rich who live in controlled domed areas, safe from

how the degradations of the environment have continued; a corporate bureaucracy who are maintained in company towns that are still livable; & the masses who live with no protection & have become more Beasts than men.

Yet within their numbers, my friend, there is old magick & old medicine & old ways of living that have re-emerged from other times. The most ancient books, written with sand-sticks in the ground even back before the time of cave paintings, say, ***events accumulate****.*

And you have to come with me now, we have to smack our despairs together & form strangely-truly-honestly hope.

Then he smacks my face hard & I smack his face hard & he smacks my face hard again & I smack his face again & we smack & smack harder & harder & then softer & softer & then we embrace, brothers, truly brothers. Smacking back & forth, & shouting: ***events accumulate! events accumulate! events accumulate! events accumulate! events accumulate! events accumulate!***

We go off together, still straight down the middle of the street, together.

* * * * * *

I Have This Friend I Don't See Very Often

I have this friend I don't see very often. Once in a while, that's about it. He travels around, studying good & evil, it's his vocation, to try to understand these things. *Do they exist outside of circumstance? Or do they simply embody some (or the sum?) of a given situation or aspect of it? Good & evil, either, both, are they forces of creation? Or estimations of the human mind about human behavior?*

He didn't always do this. I knew him back when, & I think I know what caused him to begin his travels & his studies. It was the last time he saw her, it was at the Festival, they hadn't seen each other in a long time & he didn't think that she recognized him. Perhaps her programming had been wiped, but still she was drawn to him. And he recognized her, didn't say anything to indicate they knew each other, but they had, a long time, some other time.

She'd been his automaton when he was young, tended to his very smallest needs. Sometimes he'd shut her off to clean her or change out her parts. He was always trying to scrounge up better parts to improve her behavior, her mental acuity, her sense of free will. She was one of the older types that were more modeled on human behavior & its mercurial nature. That changed with later models, until they were all discontinued altogether & rounded up by the State, & destroyed.

Except for a few who managed to assimilate into the world, especially the underground world like this Festival they were at, where he saw her one last time, & they were together for a little while. But she didn't recognize him, & I think that sent him on his travels. I think, from that moment on, he just was never going to understand. He was always going to search for *why***.**

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Stroking My Finger Across Her Back

My new beloved & I are in a house in a bedroom, close, I'm stroking my finger across her back. Writing words. I'm not sure what they mean. I think they are maybe some kind of weird impromptu incantation because now everything begins to go a little strange, then a little stranger, & then this room becomes White Woods. Just opens up, the walls fall away, melt before my eyes.

And there are many dark figures singing, drumming in the White Woods we're now in. An open field nearby. The sky is filled with the strangest colors & shapes. *What does any of this mean?*

And someone's whisper tickles feathery in my ear, as I sit with my beloved near the open field in this strange White Woods, *there are two races. One greater, one lesser. You are of the lesser. If you ever*

return home or anywhere near to it, you'll be kept chained up, in just your underwear, & that's how it will be. So don't ever go home or anywhere but.

I stand, & find standing is difficult to do. My new beloved stands better than I do, & then she grasps my hands, & pulls me straight up with all her strength, & all her love, & I feel pulled nicely, slickly, sweetly, pulled up right.

We walk into that field with the drummings & the dancings & the dark figures, because this is the way away from home & into Art, deep into Art, which I suppose you could say is a Place of its own, another kind of home.

* * * * * *

Your Whole Body Like an Electric Wire

Did you ever wake up in the night & find that your whole body is like an electrical wire, dipped in cold water? That you were wild shocked, just like that? Now I'm sitting up, I think I'm awake anyway, my new beloved still deep in her light sleepings, & I rub my mouth, but I feel a hole, & I press my fingers in tenderly. I feel that all my teeth are bashed in, they're all crooked & half-fallen out, & *what the hell? What's this all about? What does any of this mean?* I don't know.

I close my eyes & think, *please, please, please, please let this be a dream, please let it be a dream,* & I fall back toward my pillow, back toward my pillow, fall forever toward my pillow, & I fade through scenes, colorful, sepia, black and white scenes, liquid, *falling falling falling* toward my pillow.

* * * * * *

I Call Up My Old Timey Bookstore Job

I call up my old timey bookstore job. I guess now it's opened up again. I show up, go behind the register, & start helping customers, problems with the little details, playing cards of all shapes & sizes & flavors, ice machines, scanner machines, & so forth. On my break I go into the little lunchroom which is, strangely, barely big enough to sit in.

So I'm standing there with my candy bar, & I start thinking about that time that I moved back to that far Western city, & I was living in an apartment with several guys, & I was proofing their school newspaper. They were hard drinkers & newspapermen, yet still in their all-night wildcatting youths.

On the other side of our apartment, beyond that courtesy curtain, there was a bar, & I go in there & I ask the barman, he's this nice-looking older black gent, for a Diet Coke. He gives me a Gin-Ginger Ale. I drink it anyway. Thank him, smiling.

You're welcome, sir, he smiles back, speaking in his weird sort of upside-down accent, like he was speaking backwards.

I look around. It's a strange set-up. The part we live in over there, & the bar here, with the barman. *Who pays him? How does this work?*

And I'm still chewing on my candy bar, thinking about those other times. I remember the time I woke there at 3 AM. I had poems spilling out of me. I was in an alley on the ground, & they were on the ground next to me. They were written *in* the ground, but it's hard to say how. *Some kind of sand-stick?*

Maybe they more were just words I saw in the ground. I wondered, *how do I keep these words? What do I do? If I dig up the ground they won't be there.*

Finally my break is over, & I throw away my candy wrapper in the recycle bin, & I go back to work behind the back counter. I do a little better this time, & I think: *OK, if this is going be it for a while for me, this'll be it, but I bet there's more to come of all this.*

* * * * * *

There Was This Piece of Writing

Learning this will aid your perspective, if nothing else. There was this piece of writing & its fate was decided not by how good it was, but by how popular it was esteemed to be. In it, the narrator tells a story about working in an office &, in that office, there is a relation to his estranged spouse, with whom he's not spoken in a long time.

This relation, let's say cousin, sees that the narrator's trying to get his shit together, & they begin to go out to lunch. There's a little pub next to the office building. It has good mushroom burgers, cheap beer. They spend their hour with both. The narrator describes to the cousin the depths of his despair, thinking he'd never see his estranged spouse again. But, even talking to this cousin, begins to give him hope. He learns that his estranged spouse has not really resolved her feelings for him. She's certainly not looking around & this, if nothing else, is encouraging to him.

Narrator finishes his second or maybe it's his third beer, goes into the bathroom, looks at his face in the mirror, he looks tired, he looks haggard. He wants a shower badly, one of the habits he's lost over time. Looks old, old, & he realizes that, while looking at his face in the mirror, no one gets as down on him as he does himself. He washes his face, gives his cheeks a few wet slaps with the cold water, & then walks out of the men's room, & back to the bar where her cousin sits waiting,

She didn't know him in the old days, never came to any of their family events. In truth, this cousin has always been on the outs of everything, regarding family, & what's somehow interesting in all this now, the narrator observes, is that her helping him back along to where he wants to be is also helping her to find new open-hearted spaces in herself.

* * * * * *

There's This Faux Pizza Joint

There's this faux pizza joint you can go to, it's right in the center of the city. If you looked it up on a map, & if you drew a line vertically & horizontally on the map, trying to pinpoint the exact center of the city, it would be this faux pizza joint.

And if you go to this faux pizza joint, & you are friendly to the guy behind the counter—as you'd better be, because nothing good further is going happen, if you're not—& so you go into the faux pizza joint & you're friendly to the guy—, & what's going happen is that he's going let you go through the green & gold door—& you're going find yourself in a room, which is filled—almost to the four walls—with a model of the city, which you find yourself in the center of.

You can walk around it, looking at its amazing detail, every little tree, bush, the shade on that statue, that bench with the nails that poke out, that road they haven't paved in 100,000 years, cars all trying to avoid it except when they can't. All sorts of things. They're all there.

And although you can walk around the four sides, or you can walk among those trees, benches, buildings, & that's pretty cool, you may get to wondering, *well, what's this all about?* But, no, it's just best to keep moving, keep admiring it.

Like I did, you probably come to a bus stop along this certain street, toward the edge of the city &, near that bus stop, up a hill, is this house, high up on the hill. On this particular day, it's kind of rainy, kind of icy, just one of those messy winter days that nobody wants to be out in, & so you're thinking, *well, should I leave now, thank the guy behind the pizza counter. It was fun*. Him smiling, *I'm glad, thank you. Maybe stay a little while longer next time?*

Then you notice two women at different times come out of that ancient mansion on the hill, & tumble down the steps to the sidewalk below, land right at the bus stop. Crash badly, people gather round, & you think, *are these people who come from where I come from, or do they live here? Are there people for whom this is their world, & I'm just visiting from one level up? And is my world just a model for some further model up? Is this some kind of bad Star Trek novel?*

* * * * * *

Every Tuesday Night, I Meet Up with These Two Ladies

Every Tuesday night, I meet up with these two ladies in their ancient mansion, & they sing for me. But I haven't in a while & they've missed me. One of the ladies sings in a certain sweet style & she's amazing, but this time she tries something different to show, & it's good, but it's not a style close to her heart.

We take the stairs down to some kind of bar in the cellar of their ancient mansion, & they order me milk & them fruity liquor drinks from the nice-looking older black gentleman barman. There is a fourth at our table, an old, old man in shredded dreadlocks & hat. They forget to order for him. On purpose? He speaks up & says, *nothing for me*.

What is this gathering? I don't know, but it seems important. I sit back with my milk & look at these fine ladies & I say to them, *in my bedroom there's a little door in the wall, through it is a long hallway, filled with plants, & it's kinda like I crawl in there with my mother to look at them all. But we need to keep it secret, so we keep the door shut, even though it's dark when we're in there.*

They nod, sip their drinks, say, *oh, you're so sweet & kind. Would you like another milk?*

* * * * * *

Descending Up into the Gone World (I)

So I walk on from the courtyard where I've sat among my notebooks, black pens, & old memories, & I notice people are, well, they're not happy. But they're not quite as morose as before, & that's good. I go into this place, I guess it's more like an alley, I'm never sure exactly that it's there, but I just was passing by on the street, & I notice this alley, & I went inside, & it was long, & it was dark.

And then I seem to be ascending, or rather I was descending but up, if that makes any sense, into the gone world, & I found that I had a camera in my hand. It was a hard gadget to figure out, because there didn't seem to be an eye hole to look through, where you frame the picture when you take the shot, & there seemed to be more than one lens, & several buttons that didn't seem to do anything.

So this camera & I were descending upward through this glass structure, staircase after staircase, down, up. At one point I see people through layers of walls in the glass structure & they're at all angles & I'm trying to focus the camera, but it's hard to do, & there's this woman near me & I say, *I'm not taking your picture, I'm just trying to focus.*

I keep rising & rising until I find that I am now awake & sitting up in a chair in this brand-new bookstore, & I was looking down at this very maze-y book that I was trying to read my way through. No. Wait. *It's just the store map.*

* * * * * *

Descending Up into the Gone World (II)

What if dream mind is supraconsciousness? Think about it sometime. Thanks for listening. I appreciate it. I suppose you're gonna leave now. I am, too. I've got this camera to figure out, & this maze-y book, er, store map, to climb back into, or possibly climb out of, or maybe both at the same time. I really don't know, but it all started with that glass structure & things got really complicated . . .

* * * * * *

I Haven't Always Lived on This Hill of Bushes

I live in an unfurnished bush on this hill of bushes, among many other friendly bush-hill-folks, but I still leave my possessions, such as they are, in those White Woods down there. I haven't always lived on this hill of bushes. Sometimes I'll just leave for a while, & I'll go down to those White Woods, & I'll just reacquaint myself with where I come from, the glowing trees, the many wonderful, strange denizens. My friends, the Thought Fleas, guardians of the White Woods & so on.

The White Woods are not like other places, that's what I want to tell you. When you go down there, & you walk among them, especially if you're from them as I am, things will happen that you can't say waking & you can't say dream.

Because the truth of the matter is that sometimes I am walking among these White Woods, & I am dreaming, & in the dreaming I'm carrying a book in one hand, a small Secret Book with a shiny cover, & some kind of vial of juice. The object of the game I am playing, I've been playing it for years, is to try to find a way to flip the book inside out & flip the vial of juice inside out so that the power & raw materials of dreaming can become wakings. *Raw materials to waking's power.*

I lie down, after some hours, this is tiring, I love these White Woods, I love that bushy hill. I love my unfurnished bush. *Doze, dream, dream, dream, dreaming, dreaming, mmming, hmmming . . .*

—but this dream, it's so familiar, a supermarket, it's all the world I've ever known, a supermarket, & the friends I have & work with there. There's a problem with a labor automaton we took for a lark, & got caught. It's not working right now.

One of us gets taken to the manager's office & examined. They put a kind of sentient putty all over his face, looking for lies, looking for *deceptions, distractions, & despairs*. The putty is kept on his face for hours, & he can't move a muscle, as the putty examines all of his thoughts, secret, obvious, possible.

But what's happened by the end of the session is that the putty's pulled away, processed, & he's cleared, & he's sent back to us. We resume work, that's good—, & then I wake up in the White Woods, & that's good—, & then I walk back to my bush, & I crawl inside.

And then I just sit & listen sleeplessly for a while to the Imp in the Full Moon's **CACKLE! CACKLE! CACKLE!**

* * * * * *

I Was With My Acid Guru

I was with my acid guru, & we were slowly cleaning up his very messy house, very messy. Trying to put it in an order, make it nicer, others coming over too & helping. These people are new to me, friendly, we're all going to get it in order.

When everyone else thinks that things seem to be in pretty good shape now, I follow them outside to the street, & they all get into a crimson jalopy & say to me, *wanna go with us to A-The-Of-Dance?* One of them, the rainbow-haired hippie girl, offers me a psychedelic pill. I smile sincerely at her & my acid guru & the rest, & I say, *I better keep cleaning*. She smiles me kindly, presses me to keep the pill, & off they ride. *Toot! Toot! Toot!* goes their charming jalopy car-horn.

I swallow my pill & hurry back in, because there are Creatures scattered in a small back room that I'm very concerned about, & I start to panic, & I call my new beloved on my green-as-Gumby phone, & I say, *how do I sort them all out, what do I do? How do I make sure they're all safely ordered up?*

And she smiles whisper-tickling feather into my ear & says, *Once. Twice. Breathe. Relax.*

And I do.

I begin to go through the room in a very orderly fashion, picking up Creatures. I have put two knapsacks on my shoulders, & I'm stuffing them into the knapsacks, & things are starting to get better, & I'm starting to calm to the task.

I'm going to get them all, it's very important, we need to travel elsewhere.

* * * * * *

A Place of Art

There is a room that will be a Place of Art, & there are a variety of ways of getting there. One way is through the college bookstore, through its back door. Another has you walking down a particular street in the city, & looking for a particular bar called Luna T's Cafe, going inside & asking the barman with pepper gray hair, & the splatter-patterned apron, where the extra room is. He'll direct you.

That's where I'm going now, as a matter of fact. I painted this picture on a folding canvas. How it works is that the way the canvas is folded reveals a different picture—folded many times, folded in half, quarters, always something new shows. And when you fold it a few special certain ways, it's like it has an interior to it. *It's a strangely important picture*. Maybe it matters more than I do.

I want to hang it in that Place of Art, that's where I'm bound. I've been jobless for a while, spend a lot of time just calculating how much money I have left & how much my rent is. Over & over again, like a tic. Rent never changes, but how much I have left always goes down.

Friends I have, I tell them about the picture, tell them to come & see it. *I'm going to put it in that Place of Art, & there'll be a band playing too. Graffiti on the wall & my picture hung in a prideful place.* What's interesting, I'll say to some of my friends, maybe all of them, maybe none of them, I don't know who I'm talking to anymore, whether they're there or not, sitting with me in my one-room hovel, or maybe they're not sitting there at all but I tell them, *years ago, before all of this*—& I motion around my hovel—, *there were other matters. There was this Indian golfer I knew, he would show me old videos of himself playing golf when he was young. By the time I knew him, he was old & fat & bald. Liked his Snickers bars, by the bagful, like the Minis, said it gave him the illusion that he was eating fewer of them.*

And he'd show me these videos of golf games that didn't quite make sense to me, they weren't what I'd seen on television as a kid on Sunday afternoons, growing up. No, sometimes in these events it seems like dozens of golfers were hitting balls along the fairway at the same time &, I don't know, it was dangerous & dumb.

So what I'm telling you, whether you're sitting here with me in this hovel or not, is that this is not how it always was. In fact, this is not even how it shall be because, you see, far in the future from now, far from now is a box, it's a high-tech container, it's filled with worlds within worlds, & one time I was carrying it along, & I was also carrying along my little hedgedyhog friend, & I stumbled at the top of stairs, my friend fell but he was OK, & the box fell too, & opened, but nothing fell out, was there ever anything inside?

All you have is my claim that this will happen sometime in the future &, well, come to my show. My painting with the interior, maybe it's this painting wherein I've seen these things to come to pass. Tricks & tracks, tracks & trips, tricks & traps, traps & tricks, trips & trips, tricks & tricks & tricks, traps & tricks & tricks, tricks & tricks & traps, traps & tricks & traps, tricks & trips & traps . . .

* * * * * *

I'm in a Hotel Room, Which Begins to Get Strange

I'm in a hotel room, which begins to get strange. What happens first is that I'm somewhere else, like a club, & this woman has a small vial of *gooooo*, drinks half.

What is it? Dunno. Hands it over to me, *dunno*. She wants me to drink it all, all the rest, & I do, heck yeah. That's me, give me some *gooooo*, & some enthusiasm. I'll drink your *gooooo*.

But I noticed that this couch that we're sitting on is in my hotel room & there's a man sleeping over there, on the bed, won't wake up, won't leave. Soon there are others, of course.

And then I start getting worried for the Creatures, napping peaceably in an armchair facing that corner window, & wanting to make sure they don't get stomped on, or nudged aside, or scooped, as they sometimes get. More and more people show up. *Is this a gooooo party? Dunno*.

But people are on the couches, & on the beds, but after a while the couches & beds are gone.

My things are gone & instead it's an art show. But the only piece is my folded canvas artwork. *How do I even know it's an art show?* Is this the Place of Art? There's no graffiti. There's no band playing.

Is it the gooooo talking? It could be the *gooooo* talking.

I push open the door, hoping someone will come in, maybe I can ask them if it's an art show. I certainly seem convinced. I push it open, push it wide open, & I just stand there halfway in & halfway out, looking up & down the hallway, & I say aloud to the empty hallway, *you know, I'm just trying to get my shit together*.

I look across the hallway, & the door to that room is a full-length mirror, ceiling to floor, where perhaps a door once was. I look into the mirror, deep into the mirror, & I look so tired & haggard, like an old, old man. Ratty dreads, dulled green & golden eyes, more slumped than bent nose. Need a shower, need two showers, I need to pull myself together.

I look at my tired, haggard, un-showered, un-double-showered self & think, *you make things so much harder than they need to be.*

* * * * * *

It Continues, Like This

It continues, like this. My break over, I leave the tiny lunch room & its spooky memories, & I go back to the register of the old-timey bookstore I've returned to after all these years, & I work my hours away at the back counter, but I notice something.

I notice that as people buy their books, they're troubled, they're unhappy. It's nothing I'm doing, they don't respond to my smiles. They don't respond to my friendliness, & they're not rude. They're just sort of stunned, & I wonder what's going on, *did something happen out in the world?*

I ask one of them, a man with a long hat, his head in glistening pretty dreadlocks, one eye green, one eye golden, & he's buying a book about war, about peace.

I say, *what's going on, man? What's happening out there?*

He looks at me, & he wants to say something, but it's like he doesn't know what words to say. He doesn't know what language to say it in. He just looks at me & holds my glance for a moment, & I realize I've got to find out for myself, but there's hours left in my shift so I just wait, wait, *wait*.

Finally, shift over, it's evening time & I walk out into the Square, & I walk over to the newspaper stand. All the headlines are full of big words, big tall words. *Is it another attack of some kind, someone else out in the world?*

No, it's someone here, someone among us, someone who'd been among us for a long time, waiting his chance, to vent his anger upon this land & every other land. People are walking around dazed. I go over & sit at my favorite table at my favorite courtyard, which isn't there anymore, watch people walking by, scared groups.

Then there's a sort of cry, a sort of shout over at the newspaper stand, & I hurry back over, & now the headlines are saying someone with a little bit of power has struck back.

It's gonna keep happening, President Clusterfuck, Donald J. Trump. It's gonna keep happening. Every day you try to punish the world with your fury, your anger, your sense of injustice personally done to you, everyone you try to harm, there's gonna be strikes back. It's gonna be in the courts, it's gonna be in the streets, it's gonna be on the airwaves but it's gonna keep happening till you are driven one day soon from the White House in Washington, D.C.

You've made it clear how it's gonna be by you, & now we're making it clear what's gonna be by us, in response to you. So keep doing it. We will too.

* * * * * *

On My Birthday

I found myself some years ago on my birthday, looking around at the extended dwelling that I lived in at the time, it was kind of part apartment & part bar & part classroom. I woke up early that morning before anybody else got up, which was pretty early, & walked through the rooms.

One room of the apartment was filled with racks of clothes that everybody had donated to share. We wore each other clothes, female, male, whatever. It was a nice mix. You got to learn how the other guy or gal felt, you know.

Some of mine though were kept in the far corner racks, playfully mocked & derided, & I wondered why, because they didn't seem any stranger or odder or whatever, *more idiosyncratic* than anybody else's but, still, there they were, in the far corner. I don't know, maybe they were older & more worn. I never wanted to buy new clothes anyway.

I walk into the barroom &, by golly, there are people awake at the bar already, drinking their breakfast. One of them is kind to me, he always sits at a particular seat, can't tell how old or young he is. He seems to be gray-haired & about twenty, but I don't think he is.

I clap his shoulder smiling, which he returns in full, & say to him, *you're a good man, Bill.*

And everybody else at the bar laughs & mocks a little, but I get in all their faces this time, I'm a little bit annoyed, *it's my birthday*.

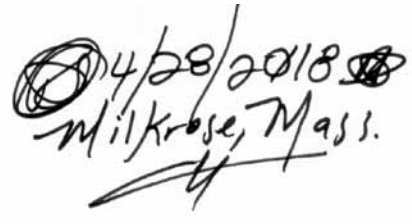
I say, *I have a Master's in English, & diction matters to me.* Someone's nodding, quietly.

Finally I walk into the classroom, & it's occupied too. There are two girls, a brunette & a blonde, I sit down with, well before classes begin. I sit between them, & I find myself paying attention to each in turn, swiveling my head back & forth.

But I'm married, so I'm not flirting, just friendly, & ask the brunette, *so what do you wanna do when you get out of here, this bar, this classroom, the racks of clothes? What do you wanna do in this world?*

Her smile is vague, but she thinks a long moment, & then she says, *what I wanna do right now is wish you a happy birthday & give you a tiny kiss on the nose.*

And she does.



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Gregory Kelly

Two Crows in Flight

two crows in flight
like unravelling balls
of string

weaving corrugated
skies musing about
the distance

between wing and
soil between hand
and foot

tying shoe laces
like sowing a
harvest with care

or learning the
pattern of the knot
for the first time

two crows in flight
in chase dodging
one another dodging

clouds and grass
buffeted by the wind
perched on the oak

branch for a rest
and then it's back
to flight again

on spindling stair-
cases on playground
slides where the

floor is made from
woodchips and
laughter on records

revolving under
the needle, needles
orchestrating

the symphonies that
move our soles,
our souls

two crows in flight
until the balls of
string have unraveled
and we have tied
the two expanses
together again.

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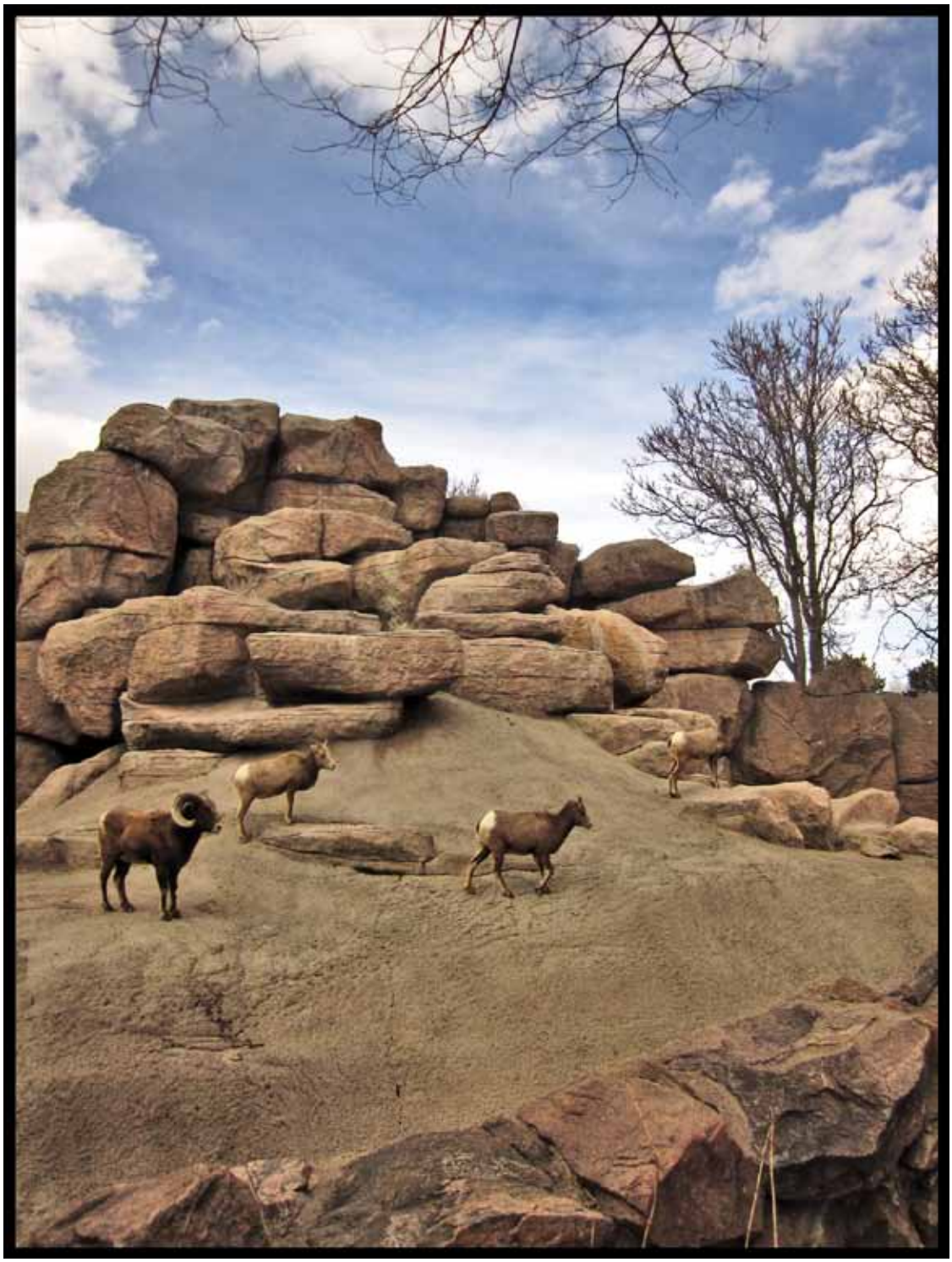

Charlie Beyer

Sapphire Sins
[Travel Journal]

Continued from Cenacle | *102* | *December 2017*

xxviii. The Boys Arrive

June 16th. OK. Totally bat shit crazy now. Up at 5 AM. Waiting. Waiting for the boys, Diego and Evan, to show up. What the hell? 10 AM now. That's 16 hours so far. *Shit*. It takes only 13 in my old 55 MPH rat truck. *Where the hell? What? What the fuck?* I can't stand this waiting. This loneliness. I'm worse than the pimply girl, waiting for the phone call to invite her to the prom. Maybe she never gets the call? Humans suck. A dog would be on schedule.

Finally, 11 AM, I can't stand it anymore. *Where, oh where in the fuck?* I want to do the new age electronic thing. Text Terry to text them to text her to text me back. But I got the Walmart cheepie fone, with no battery and only 7 min of phone time left. Fucker's dead. I could dig out the electronic box, hook the converter to the truck battery, the controller to the mini-transformer, the transformer to the phone, start the truck, burn $5 in gas for 20 min of trickle charge in the phone. Then text the text. But that complication often crosses wires and fries something on the end or in the middle.

Awww, fuck it. They must be hung up by a new-fallen tree across the road. They're down there whittling on the obstruction with a pocket-knife. I'll go down there with the chain saw. I lock the cat in the tent. Drive down, cutting out 3 trees on the way that I skirted on the way up by only smashing out the side light of my truck. But there— all of a sudden—there they are! *Finally. Fucking finally.*

All back to camp. They are red-eyed and stumbling. We smoke the scrag, which has me reeling. I read them the permit program from my notes. Sounds weird, my mind regurgitated through my voice to apparently brainless recipients. Evan's only comment is that "Criminal Miners" sounds better than "Mining Criminals." Diego says nothing, involved in his radio and phone. Why is this of no concern to them?

More smoking. Beer drinking. Diego has some rye made by Uncle Martiniz. We're all pretty fucked up and bleary. Evan announces that he is either going to sleep, or get on with it. I know the crash-out program. These guys will be out till 9 PM, then up for 2 hours, and then back out cold until the next day. Better to squeeze the last drug buzz out of them now, before the coming coma.

We pack and pack. The wheelbarrow is maxed. The wheeled pump packed. The dolly piled with totes and tied with abundant ropes. Another reefer and we're off. Hours of grueling trek downhill. The steep hill. This hill is a monster. Drops 1200 feet in less than a mile. The path is an old road carved in by a drunken dozer operator. Never really dug into the hill, just scraped some of the trees out of the way. The maniac just dove off the edge and seemed to smash into every available tree in his path.

At first it's just a steep road for a quarter-mile, but then it comes to a drop off where it's 20 degrees (40%) for 500 feet (horizontal), about a 1000 feet on the slope. Now this shit is steep. Ya slip on your ass cause it's only 10 inches behind you to the ground. If you let go of anything, it goes flying off down the hill till it crashes into a tree. Then there is another 15-degree hill in another 1000 feet. After that it sorta gets level through a small forest, a small rocky hill, and then down another 300 feet to the creek and Sapphire City camp.

I can't handle the wheelbarrow, it rolls out of control, and then I'm dragging the feet to stop it.

I whine and snivel to the kids that I am old and clumsy—*isn't there another load I can struggle down?* There is also a pump built onto 4 wheels that I try instead. It rolls fine but I have to jack it sideways to stop it. Every few hundred feet we have to stop and saw logs off the trail with the chain saw.

Soon we are at the top of the first killer hill, the 20-degree down one. We launch over the edge, *roll, drag, crash*. My arms are near torn out of their sockets. I crash into a tree to get some relief from the draw-and-quartering. Evan goes to the bottom of the killer hill, then returns to help with another load. Diego helps or, more accurately, does most of the work letting one load down 50 feet, then coming back up with alacrity for the other.

The kid has a lot of useful energy but a mega-shitty attitude. As I pass him at one point, he will not speak, only glowers hatefully at me. How am *I supposed to grok that? Little puissant is puffed up about a little work? I'm offering him the treasure of a lifetime, what the fuck is he fuming about?*

I decide not to engage in this conversation. I'll just be Mr. Smiley till all the crap is moved to the lower camp. I'm whooped after just getting to the bottom of the 20-degree hill, and then we continue down the 15-degree hill, each with their crazy load. The axel breaks on my pump car but, after some wire and fucking with it, it becomes semi-workable, enough to continue on.

It's kind of an Amazon trek down the mile hill with the loads. All that's missing is the screaming monkeys. We are all drenched in sweat. Evan goes ahead again with his 120 pounds and the saw. We hear lots of intense sawing below as we work our loads down, foot by foot. Must be one fuck of a log-jam down there. It's sawed out by the time we get there. A dozen trees about a foot in diameter, tied in as much of a knot as they could possibly get. Evan has sawed a 6-foot-wide trench in the tangle, which is 8 feet high on either side.

On we go through the nice level section of woods that is about a third of a mile. Diego is ahead, stopped, silent. We come across him just before the last rocky uphill section. The big wheelbarrow has died. The wheel is sideways; half the plastic spokes are broken out. Diego manages to hold it together with the upper part rubbing against the box. Evan ahead again until the next 2-foot-diameter log across the trail.

We bumble forward and catch up. Diego has removed his shoes a mile back. *What the hell?* He's hoofing along like a true bush native. My pasty dainty feet couldn't do it. A quarter-inch pebble and I'd be done. But he's tromping across broken rock and not even wincing. OK, more power to him then.

The chainsaw runs out of gas halfway through the 2-foot-diameter log. The loads are struggled around on the high end. Now up the short rocky hill. Both Diego and I are sort of stuck every 3 feet from the rocks. Me, because I'm a wimp; him because the wheel is broken cockeyed. I jerk my load up backwards in 2-foot increments to gain ground. Takes 4000 jerks at least to go 300 feet. The math is bad.

Finally at the top of the last little hill, now two rocky hills down. Two hours to the bottom since we started, the empty camp in front of us, skeletal Sapphire City. It's raining. We're wet but steaming from the heat of transit. We check out the mine just below camp. The pond is stuffed with water, the creek huge. Water is everywhere. Where we will mine is flooded.

Do we set up camp? Evan voices no. He's trashed in body and mind. Hungry all to hell. Exhausted. No energy for camp set up. OK. No problem. We got some shit down here. Maybe 400 pounds of crap in one trip. Enough is enough. We ditch the loads here and head back up the hill. I tell the kids to go ahead. I know I'm gonna be slow. Mega-slow. They charge up the hill with the dogs. The big dog is more than happy to head back to kibble camp. His hips hurt and he's moving slow. But four times faster than me.

For me, the uphill is way hard. I've been smoking and lounging all winter. I am absolutely out of shape. I walk like a 90-year-old who lost his cane and has a load in his pants. It's way hard. Heart is pounding. Breathing in ragged gulps of air. If I'm going to have a stroke, this is where it's gonna happen. One step at a time, I tell myself.

Two hours—I said it would take me to get to the top. An hour later, still huffing and puffing,

I'm halfway up the killer 20-degree hill. Evan shouts down from the top to see if I'm still alive. Nice of him to come a quarter-mile back to check on me. *I'd check on me*, this is a sure chest-buster for an old fart.

I work my way to the top with tiny steps. Rest. Send Evan back to camp. I make it to camp myself in another 20 minutes. Dinner is cooking. We eat meat and all pass out at 8 o'clock. Still very light out. Pomo the cat sleeps in the truck and could care less about anything.

xxix. Setting Up Sapphire City

I'm up at 6 in the dawn. Pretty nice, this 17th of June. Kids up at 8ish. We resume loading up after breakfast. We kept all our camping equipment up here yesterday, knowing we had more loads to go down. Today we move all our living shit to the bottom, leaving a tarp up, some firewood, and a few chairs. A long morning of packing mixed with half-hour breaks to huff more substance. We're stoned, but keep going to get everything packed onto loads with wheels.

About 1 PM we head down. Two impossible loads for the kids that they stagger and weave with. I have Pomo in a cat pack on my belly. The cat never struggles a whit all the way down. It knows a good ride when it gets in one. *What's the alternative?* Follow like a dog. Not gonna happen.

Once at the bottom, Sapphire City, Evan and Diego go back up for a second load that's as bad or worse than the first wobbly load. I set up camp, along with Pomo's and my tent. Then tarps are strung above everywhere, a 90% roof. The city is looking nice.

The boys get back in the late evening, drenched in sweat. Exhausted. All the crap is here now, but nothing has yet been done in the mine. After a dinner of something that fries easy, a cheery fire going, Diego rolls a joint that looks like my leg, a packed mixture of homemade hash and Purple weed. This kicks the ass of any remaining energy we may have, and we collapse into our respective beds.

xxx. Mining Day

June 18th. A noonish start to the mine. The kids slept late as twenty-somethings are fraught to do. Then the ceremonial huffing of a mass of weed. Deigo rolls blunts, which are sliced cigars, the tobacco dumped out, and fine weed packed in. The cigar leaf makes a smooth smoke. The contents rattle our brains. I have to calculate of how to set up. A lot of trees need to be chain-sawed. Old flume boxes and logs need to be thrown around. I want to show these guys some sapphires out of the dirt—fast, before they lose interest.

A fickle lot, these new cyber babies, always need constant stimulation. So I chose an area that we covered with tailings last year. We had gotten down to sand, and thought that was the bottom, but the sand sits on top of the bedrock with the big fisheyes down in the cracks. The big fisheyes being the larger smooth sapphires which look liquidly and luminously up at you. So we have to shovel a few cubic yards off the top to get under the tarp.

We are able to use the creek as part of the system. Catching it in a flume (a long 3-sided box), running the water to where we are working, and then onto a screen. By afternoon, we are running our gravel through the system, cleaning up maybe 5 square feet on bedrock. The dirt is thick and silty. Out of this, we clean up 45 carats with one nice cuttable of 2.8 carats. *Ha! I did it.* The stones are here. I got their number. Proof is in the pudding and all that. Steaks for dinner. Joints for desert. *A great day.*

xxxi. Suddenly—Terry!

June 19th with a blue sky. It is going to be a *hot* day. Everything in the mine is set up. If everybody works, then a 100-carat minimum today. I think I'll start a 6 x 8 foot square pit. Diego and I commence clearing off the overburden. He is quiet and surly. A dark brow with dagger knife glowering

glances at me. *What the hell?* Digging is digging. Yes, it's misery, but the treasure is at the bottom. Evan is passed out in his hammock. Not sure what his exhaustion problem is—after 18 hours of sleep?

Suddenly—Terry arrives, waving and yelling as she comes through the woods. Her micro-dog is all over the place like an electron in a fire. Terry is *here*. A wonderful day. *Early*. This is great, but we stop mining soon after we get to work to get her unpacked, celebrate, and show her around. She is also a little loopy from the long drive. She has a bandelero of joints made from pot shop floor sweepings. Four dollars each. We smoke some of these. Though I had been horny all to hell, the weed pushes my testosterone back into storage while it amps up the electrical surge in my hippocampus. All brain, no dick.

But I am *so-so* happy to have Terry here. Someone to talk to, if I can get her to talk. She doesn't generally bring up spine-tingling topics—usually just food, dogs, and drugs—, but it beats nothingness. I know I can talk to her about personal things, but I feel duplicitous about telling her my fantasies about boning her and the art lady all in one tree house heap. In fact, I'm holding back and trying to figure out how to wrangle it. That's the problem with fantasies—hard to make them real.

Terry joins with the shovel later and we chaw away a few yards digging down to the pay layer. She is an entergetic excavator. A few pans are washed with a few tiny stones. Encouraging . . . but hardly filthy riches.

xxxii. Good Day of Moving and Destruction

June 20th. Longest day of the year. We start by mining a patch underneath the previously buried tarp, which is into the bedrock about 8 inches in a 2-by-6 foot area. Small sapphire stones are recovered, but enough to match the predicted grade of 5 carats to the square foot. Diego works continuously but quietly. Rarely says anything. Evan doesn't work. He's in a weird mood. Back to sleep all the time. Habitating his hammock like a horse-fly. *But Terry's here! Yea!* She's all sparky this morning, making us all breakfast and giving snacks to the dogs.

In the mine, a few trees are rudely growing on top of our treasure, so I cut them down before they fall and kill us in the course of operations. Feeling hopeful and exuberant, I lay out a 15-by-6 foot hole. A huge hole. That should be approximately 110 square feet. Or 1100 carats if the grade holds true to 10 carats to a square foot. A good pile over 500 carats hopefully, even if the grade is just 5 carats / square foot.

We get the Honda pump going. High-pressure water. This blasts the crap out of the bank, washing away the overburden. Fuck shoveling when this is ten times faster. Yes, it destroys the overburden layer, and the bio layer is washed into muck as the chipmunks flee for cover. Plants and roots and forest floor are all washed into a gelatinous goo in the creek bottom. No wonder the government outlawed this type of mining 80 years ago.

When we get down to the middle layer of large rough rock, we set up the wooden sluice box and shovel some into it. But after 4 or so cubic feet, there are only tiny sapphires. We test-pan the new cut into the hill with poor success. The bedrock is soft so it's not holding the sapphires in a geologic way. It is very poor recovery.

Quit late in the day. I take a bath in the big pool but the water is freezing cold. I can't even stand in the crap for more than a minute before my feet feel like they are in fire, though just the opposite. When I get my hair washed, it feels like it's in a ten-ton vice.

We moved 4 to 5 cubic yards of overburden. A good day of moving and destruction. I show Diego how to melt aluminum cans in a steel bean can. He loves it. We melt the soda pop cans just to see if we could do it. Diego is all into this. A pyro-project. He melts can after can with a smile on his face. Glad to make him happy somehow. It gets dark late. A short night with light in the 5 AM morning. Pomo wanders in the dead of night for at least an hour. His fur is camouflaged in the black and white shadows.

xxxiii. Nugget Blobs of Aluminum

A beautiful morning, but a 40-degree wind chill till noon, and still cold in the shade this June 21st. Evan and Diego go to the top. Get more crap to bring down, including 10 gallons of water. Glad I avoided that detail. Terry and I converse about the art hussy who I wanted to do the three-some with us. I tell Terry that "She, the hussy" is not invited anymore. In reality, I'm the hussy. I have written the art lady to stay away. No parking here. No treasure for the "Art Hussy." Terry likes this, the return to mono-mono-monogamy plan. My hormone-soaked brain can't understand what the resistance is to a spine tingling orgy in the woods, but I have better sense than to argue the point. It's just her and me. So the talk is OK-ish. It calms tension between us (as long as I keep my mouth shut). My balls are not getting the "Bobbit" treatment—yet.

Everyone returns. Dogs leading the pack. We hook up all the electronics to charge in the sun. A new thing. Technology in the wild. Charges the phones, the flashlights, the radio, the drill, runs the night lights, all the crap we've dragged down here. After much fussing with camp stuff, everybody goes down to the mine about 1 PM. We wash the overburden down in the pit for 3 hours, using rock raking, prying, shoveling, and blasting with the water hose. The area is down to within 1 foot of bedrock.

We pan a trench of 6 buckets that show *nothing*. Not in or on the soft bedrock. No black sand, no hematite. Horribly weird and discouraging. A big area cleared and no sapphires. *WTF*? We pan and smoke and contemplate our bad luck. Terry tries a bath, but the water is too icy even for her, who can usually dip into water 50 degrees below her skin temperature. She is howling and whooping it up by the pond, naked in the tree-filtered sunlight, her breasts bounding in the air as she hops about to try and warm up.

In the evening, Diego smelts all the cans he can find, about 50. I make a mold to pour it in, but when the coconut water can is half full (the crucible for this process), Diego spills the melt into the fire. Makes nugget blobs of aluminum the size of match-books in the ashes of the fire. Some is recovered. It's a cool night, 40 in the 5 o'clock morning, the cat slipping about in the shadows of the woods.

xxxiv. Digging is All

45 degrees by 7 AM June 22nd. I have a small obsession with time and temperature. I actually want to record the time and temperature every hour, then make a nerd graph like the closet engineer that I am. But I know it means nothing, has no purpose. I need to visualize myself as an Old Time Miner, with just one monomaniacal quest—dig the shit out of everything, harvest the treasure.

I have to put everything else out of my mind, my urge to test out the tree house in a sexual frenzy with Terry, even though the extra split tail is not in the love pile. I have to stop worrying what the others think about my Hitler-esque declaration about how to mine. I have to put away thoughts of white sand beaches and encouraging scientists inviting me on fantastic underwater dives to save coral, bringing me into a world of fascinating science and co-workers. I have to clear my mind of drugs and lay off the tobacco.

Yeah right! The drugs cloud my mind as to what the purpose of all this is? They do a good job. And, actually, I love that. Why the hell do I need to be purposeful and clear, my mind filled with what could be? Filled with the angst of what I'm doing with my life? I don't need that shit. I need to *dig*.

Digging is all. I need only drag my brain down to the pit and grip the shovel handle. What ever that does, I know it will propel me into the future. *Digging is life*. Think no farther. Digging with a frosted brain is nice. Each shovelful is a new thing. A new experience. Another step into a fanciful future. A different future of social and political import. A step away from past lives of TV and drugs. A new beginning for my brain. Visions within visions to torture my mind. So it's certainly joint time now. Time to grip the muck stick and capture sapphires.

We dig a 4 x 2 foot trench down under the tree this day, that is now a stump still clinging to its

root rocks below. Must be 3 feet down to blocky bedrock from the top of the roots. A long dig— all day drenched by the flailing hose whipping around and giving us an icy soaking shower. Then some hand-dig in the washed pit. 20 carats recovered, one cuttable. Seems a little played out. Half the expected base grade. Tomorrow a new spot with greater hope for higher recovery.

It's been a beautiful day today. Birds are starting to come out of their winter hiding places. We lounge on the dam by the pond a lot today, soaking up the sun that is always in short supply. Terry and I make love in the late evening, thrashing around like we've never seen these body parts before. Diego's tent is too close and he can probably hear everything. We are rude and don't curtail our groans, moans, and our orgasmic expulsions. Later, when things calm down, the cat sleeps on my face. Terry says this is as close to two pussies I'm ever gonna get. The cat wraps his tail under my nose and I drift in to dream . . . imagining.

To be continued in Cenacle | *104* | *June 2018*

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Courtesy of Charlie Beyer

Ace Boggess

Letter to Four Old Postmen Every Day
at Noon Playing Dominoes at a Table
in the Gino's Pizza and Spaghetti House

numbers erase the value of all else
as counting backward while an anesthetic hums its lullaby

others allow you to pound the table
fifteen twenty-five fifty you speak

as though computers touching your screens
to slide an application into place

the same in lunch & dress you stop between the bones
to gnaw at pepperoni projecting from your Italian subs

I imagine you dancing with deliveries you make
as you escape what boxes hold you like unopened letters

how you remove your winter hats &
show us you have faces

more than just pneumatic tubes
sucking our words through a straw

* * *

Letter to a Droplet of Water

I watched you streak
down the tub's edge

like a star fall with clarity
along the photonegative of night

so light like a fingertip
over skin receptive to the touch

I wish I could possess you
like a firefly

in the gentle prison
of my hands

* * *

Gamble

I play the suited connectors
I play the long shots

I only bet on dogs named Ace
I bet on lethargic dogs that surprise everyone

yes I've lost money
yes bad beats

yes I'd roll snake eyes
were there no ones on the dice

were there no aces
the ivory faces blank as a glacier's

sometimes I win in spite of me
in the morgue

staring down corpses cold & mute
as *I am that I am*

one said I have honest eyes
one said I give so much away

he reads my poker face & weeps
from all the loneliness he sees

* * *

"Thanks for Ending Your Poems"
—rejection letter with typo

at first you had us hopeful all atremble
your image of the sun ablaze through early overgrowth

clearly referred to war in the Middle East
but why did you leave the light so soon

to describe graveyards of acorn husks
caskets clustered half in half out of earth?

you went on forever about the acorns
we didn't think you'd shut up about those fucking acorns

also why do squirrels keep running across your lines
like little silver missiles?—oh never mind

from there it's a tangle of indecency
hunters raising rifles in the dawn mist

deer bouncing past children in backyards
as we wait & wonder which will be shot first

brakes squeal from the highway yet we never see the crash
smell fumes or burning hair

where are the blood & skulls? where's the shock & awe?
worse there go those squirrels again frolicking on a fencepost

trying to squeeze a plum between their teeth
they run on & on through all of history

until let's face it you have nothing left to say &
like an obnoxious wedding guest say more

* * * * * *

Tamara Miles

Same Moon Shining

[Memoir Excerpts]

The Man in the Moon

In 1965 and 1966, my parents made trips to Kansas City to see Clinton and Betty. On the first trip, Mama was pregnant, and her mother went along. Granny Moon rarely traveled, so it was a treat for her. They went to the Kansas City Zoo. Clinton owned some rental cabins on Bull Shoals Lake, and they enjoyed going there together.

On the second trip, I was an infant, maybe six months old, and everything was going well until Clinton had too much to drink and dropped me. Mama was furious and told Dad they would be packing up and leaving the next morning, and that is exactly what they did. It was the last time Dad would ever see his parents—not because of what had happened, but because he just never went back. His own life kept him from it, as it spiraled slowly out of control.

What I remember about the first six or seven years of my life is so sketchy, so fragmented … scenes of tension and violence at home, hitting my Dad on the legs with my small fists when he was hurting Mama, her telling me it was okay, to go to my room. Once something she loved got broken, and I kept saying I would put it back together though she said it didn't matter. He chased her with something in his hand; odd that I see it as a fork. He knocked the phone out of her hand when she tried to call for help.

There were happier times, too. Christmas trees. Songs: "Tammy's in Love," "How Much is that Doggy in the Window?" Birthday cake. The man landing on the moon. Mama sat me in front of the television and made sure I saw that miracle in black and white. Once, after a fight, Dad stood at the door with his arms folded. Mom and I were on the couch. He kept saying, "I'm not going to work until you tell me you love me."

I asked Mama once if she and Dad ever had any fun together, and she said they sometimes went to see the Braves. Dad has a darker memory of one of those times. We were walking through the crowded stadium, and a man scooped me up and started walking away. Dad ran after him, "Hey buddy, where you going with my daughter?" The man said he had mistaken me for another child. I have a vague memory of Mama pointing out the moon to me when we were in the stands.

Another time I told my pediatrician that my Daddy needed a shot in the butt. I had fainting spells starting at about age two. There was an electroencephalogram, a diagnosis of petit mal epilepsy, and a prescription for phenobarbital. I took it until I was eleven and my EEG was normal. I read once that phenobarbital, long term use, can lower the I.Q. I started first grade when I was five, and could read just about anything by second grade. Later on in my life, when I was about 25, a psychiatrist told me that I probably never had petit mal epilepsy or any kind of brain abnormality beyond that induced by emotional trauma.

Oh, and I remember that I found a doll once, outside somebody else's house, and brought it home, said somebody at church had given it to me. It was my first conscious lie. I also learned that touching myself for pleasure is something that nice girls didn't do, not even when it was a way to relieve a terrible anxiety.

We were living in Georgia in 1970 when Dad hit and killed a woman with his car. Recently, Dad told me that the lawyer Mama got for him was "old, but good," and then he remembered something the old lawyer said. Speaking of the woman who had just lost her life, who was on the lam from criminal troubles in Texas, he said, "You probably did society a favor."

Dad remembers being surprised that a professional man would say such a thing. It does not surprise me, however. I have found this to be a common mindset toward women who break the rules and live outside of the boundaries set for them.

* * *

Night Blindness

My father killed a woman,
around 1970—hit her with his car
on a night covered in snow,
hard to see, coming from the bowling
alley, drinking beer with buddies.

It turned out she was a sad person,
a raven-haired woman, down on her luck,
suicidal, some said, criminal troubles,
had to leave someplace to get away,
and ended up in Marietta, Georgia.

She wore a dark coat. She walked
up the road in that weather, in the freezing dark.

Another man had stopped to see
If she needed a ride. She was standing
at the car door; it was open, and he wanted
her to get in. I don't know if she would have,
although it seems so,

but it doesn't matter because my father
didn't see her, and somehow in the confusion
of snow and shadow and another car coming,
he plowed right into her.

He left the scene but soon after confessed
to a cop at the Waffle House.

My mother got him a lawyer.

Because of the woman's
history (and because no one in her family or anyone
else came to court on her behalf), he did no time
for this. He lost his license for six months, but kept
driving anyway,

because he had to get to work somehow,
and come home with paint splotches all over
his white painter's pants.

He was a good painter, neat lines every time.

* * *

And Down Will Come Baby, Cradle and All

We now return to September 8, 1942. My father's birth mother had decided to give him up, and the time of transfer was imminent. She called the superintendent of the Cradle (Mrs. Pearl Matthews) and asked her to come around and see her. She was unemployed and didn't have the taxi fare, nor did she feel like coming on the streetcar.

"This was her excuse for asking the Sup't to see her" is written on the report I have. Also written there is: "She was not emotional, but seemed interested in her child and its future." It? He was three months old. He had a name.

She had broken with her family "since they seemingly think she has done something very bad in giving up her child." At this, I shook my head. These people, flesh and blood, were unwilling to help her, unwilling to house her, support her financially or emotionally, but they turn around and say *she* has done a terrible thing?

This young woman, whose name remains as yet a mystery to me, had now lost everybody—her husband, her family, her baby. Did she have a friend? I hope so. She was denied a job because of her "record." So what was it, exactly, that people expected her to do?

Fast forward to 1972, and look into the window of my home in Smyrna, Georgia. I was seven. Mama had enough of all of it. She packed up everything while Dad was at work, and she called her brothers Buddy and Dexter to come and meet us. She told me later that the only reason she stayed as long as she did is that she thought my father couldn't live without her. Well, that, and I was crying all the time.

I remember the day we left. Dad stood by in his white painter's pants flecked with paint and watched us go. I think I ran back and gave him a hug.

Sometimes people have said to me, with utmost seriousness, "I don't believe in divorce." I just want to laugh out loud, again. What do they think, that people who get divorced believed in it either, when they signed their names, when they put their hearts into the marriage? And frankly, who the hell do they think they are, making such a pronouncement? Ever been beaten? Ever been miserable? Ever felt misunderstood, unloved, unappreciated?

Ever had a little girl who cried all the time because she was afraid? Ever felt they couldn't sit still another minute because it just wouldn't work no matter how much they tried? Ever just fell madly, blindly in love with somebody else and feel like you might be able to breathe for the first time in years?

Furthermore, I've seen people stay married when they can't stand each other, and all they do is fight, or ignore each other, or put each other down in public, and make their children miserable while they are at it, and somehow they want to call that a good thing, the "right" thing to do? They want to call that "being faithful"—to what? The suffering saints, the mother martyrs who sacrifice themselves, give up all their dreams, and somehow that teaches their daughters how to live and be happy, how to love themselves, how to have a happy marriage?

I'll say this to people who say they just couldn't live with a divorce—or with a bankruptcy—or with giving up a baby—or with whatever behavior they find egregious—exactly what my friend once said to such a person: "Lady, you'd be amazed what you can live with." Mama and I got out of that house. There would be no more domestic violence, no more misery of that type.

Mrs. Ward had been my first-grade teacher, in Smyma, and Mrs. Barnhart was my second-grade teacher, in Gurley, Alabama. When we left the place we had gone for shelter, we moved back to Huntsville, Alabama, and somehow I ended up going to three different schools for third grade. I'm not sure why. Something to do with getting a better job, or a better school, or a different arrangement for after school care, maybe.

But there was also the business of Dad coming for a visit, getting me in the car, and driving off with me. Sirens, a chase, my mother's brother the cop, and a warning once Dad was caught: "Don't come back here again, or I'll put you under the jail." I don't remember it. I remember flashes of confusion.

So third grade is mostly just a blur to me, but I remember Lincoln Elementary School, and I remember a Mrs. Hawk. She thought I was too young for third grade, and she wanted to hold me back. Mama said no. I got my first and only paddling that year. For fourth grade, we were in Cullman, Alabama. I liked the apartment there, black imitation leather couches and red curtains. Mama was happier even though she was always worried about money. She fell in love with a drummer named Eddie, and I adored him. She was always a good mother.

One time, Dad called from a pool hall, drunk, and begged to speak to me. She handed me the phone. "I love you," he said. All I said was, "Okay." I didn't hear from him again and didn't know where he was until I was 25, and had a baby of my own.

* * *

Moving Around

On one occasion, walking home from school, a little girl said to me, "My mommy says I can't play with you because you don't have a daddy." Even today, when I think of it, I'm stunned by the callousness of that mother.

I had a daddy, of course—he was just missing—, but what in the world did that have to do with me? I had an old wooden box of his that I think he had used for storing belongings in the military. It was painted red, and I used it as a toy box. I kept it for a long time and wish I had it now, but it went where lost things go when a person moves around a lot. Home for

me was wherever my mother was. I went to ten different schools before I graduated in 1983. Mama said, "I thought your Dad would show up when it was time for you to graduate." He did not.

Dad was living in the Lamar Motel in Marietta, Georgia; he lived there for ten years, but I did not know this at the time. He got married about 1972 to a woman named Irene even though he was still legally married to Mama. It's a bother to think about such things when a person is busy drinking. He and Irene used to love to dance together. They would go to the local VFW and chase the night away. Irene had great legs, Dad said.

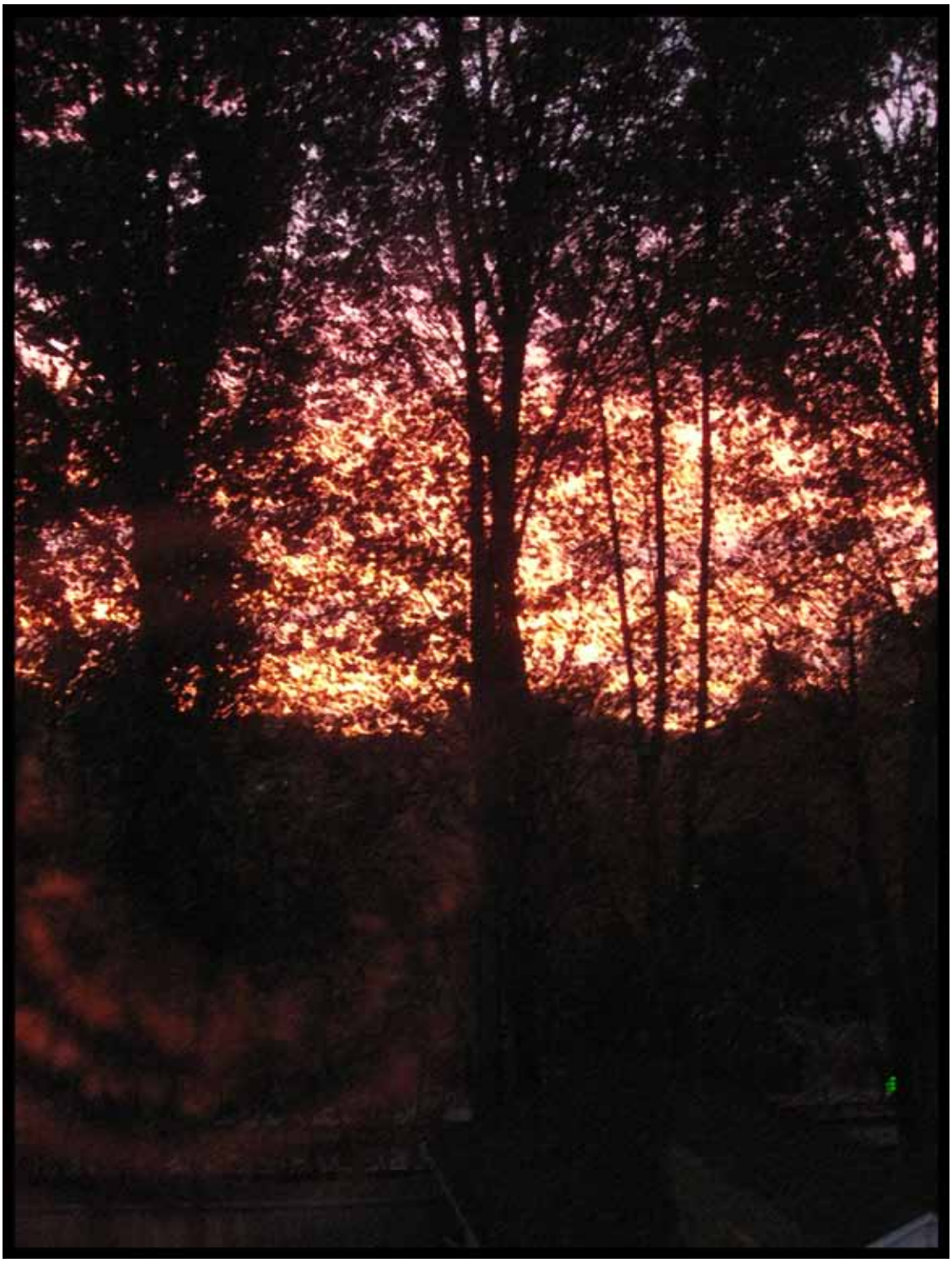
I asked him if he loved her back then, and he said, "Yeah, I guess I did but, to tell you the truth, it was the sex."

They "divorced" and married again, a year or so later, and then divorced again. Irene is the closest Dad has ever had to a lifetime love. They were together on and off for decades, and married again, maybe this time legally, before she passed away, in December 2016.

I loved Irene, too. She was a gentle soul, fragile in her old age, but I did not know her when she was young. She loved country music and western movies. Dad is a music buff, also, loving the old country and pop hits from the 1970s especially. It's something, thank God, that we have in common, that we can enjoy together. He likes to hear me sing, too.

During the years between their second attempt at marriage and the third, Dad and Irene married other people. Esther was much older than Dad—twenty years or more older. This has never struck me as strange, however, given his mother issues. Irene was about 15 years older as well. If I give Dad mother issues, I have to grudgingly admit to father issues of my own, don't I?

* * * * * *



Raymond Soulard, Jr.

Many Musics

Eleventh Series

"Myriad lives like blades of grass,
yet to be realized,
bow as they pass."
—The Shins, "For Those to Come," 2003.

xxv. Remember Some Things

And again. Some way among
will, whim, & wish there is remembrance.
Sometimes clearing the way on
is first clearing the way back.
Remember old. Thus, remember new.

The water is cold, cold, salt swilling
through my lips. I am nearly nude,
swimming hard for that rocky shore,
long, slow strokes, working the shifting
currents with my muscles, let, let,
there is long memory in my body for this
Wide Wide Sea, its dark depths, &
so I just have to let myself navigate
its old home.

Remember some things. Again you, Architect,
neared me in my dreams, & those places
in my sleep beyond dreams. Walking
closer than before, a heat between
us I know I did not make alone in my
bed. Your soft voice licking near my ear.

"The Tangled Gate. Find me through
the Tangle Gate. Will you choose
to return? Will you?"

I woke in my small warm bed
in the Pensionne & it's like I
never stopped moving from then
to now, from that morning,
packed what little I treasured
in my Blue Suitcase, traveling
the far distance on the Mainland
to the shore of the Wide Wide Sea.

A lone girl wandering the empty shore,
looking for a ride, I could only
feel myself amazed that I came
upon a handsome young man
rigging up his boat for sailing.

He is dark-eyed, friendly, willing
to help me out. Because he is shy
& young, & my smile is pretty & practiced?
He fishes these waters, knows
its fish & Sea Creatures better than
girls. We sail for some days. I let him
hold my hand. It seems enough.

Then I am going. He's shocked, & sad.
I swathe him in a smile, & am
over into the water, & swimming hard
to that rocky shore. Takes me
slowly, reluctantly.

I choose to return, Architect.
To you, to this Island.
To the Castle, my old Dancing Grounds.
To the Tangled Gate.

The shore is rocky, I crawl half-
drowned ashore. Push, pull, push.
But now an argument about where my body
belongs. Island or Sea?

And again, my will, my whim,
I choose to return to the Island.
Castle. Dancing Grounds. Tangled Gate. You.
Remembering some things, something's
ticking harder, little to do with time.

* * * * * *

xxvi. Sniff

Working my way along these big rocks,
I remember the Queen, my father
the King's jealous, helpless wife. She dwelled
among us like a living peace treaty,
a war prevented in her sad young eyes.
Her deepest failure was loving my
father honestly, helplessly. Brought her
witchly cult, three cragged old women,
like obscure terms in that treaty that none
but her cared about.

When small, thinking her smile towards me
sometimes kind, curious, I lingered
near her chamber, listen to them discuss
herbs for fidelity. Trailed them on
full moon nights into deep clearings in
the One Woods, watched the old crones
undress & present her in supplication
to . . . *something*. Their screeching songs,
wild-limbed dances. How silent
the One Woods those nights! A patch
of bad surrounded them, depthless
hunger, maw of power collected by fear.

The King my father worried of her not.
Bade her cult far removed from him
at all times. His obsessed play for what
long lost from him. An old love,
an only love. The Queen spake her name
only once in all the times I spied.
Deirdre. The crones witnessed by their witchly
fingerings his subterranean negotiations
to retrieve her from somewhere far.
They told her of a Beast he sparred.

Urged her truck with this Beast too.
"I have nothing, my sisters."
Eldest spoke, like a cackle blooded of merry.
"You have the one thing all Beasts
& men wish. All they want of women.
What they cannot unmix from themselves."

She listened. Foolish, hopefully foolish,
she listened. I followed her to
this rocky shore, watched her present
her still young body, handsome face,
to a . . . *large something*. Not a man,
but not not one. So large they used
a wooden contrivance to couple.
Still she roared in body's pain
& heart's anguish.

Twas said she was seeded, & shut
away in her chambers to wait.
I believed. I didn't believe. Summoned
to her chamber, I came with the
lessing interest of one with my own
body's new burblings, heart's novel
obsessions. Like my father, hardened
& uncaring. Like him, cruel.

Raised up in her bed, seeing me alone
as never before. She touched my hair,
my new breasts, lied & called me
beloved daughter. Kindness, curiosity,
now calcified into vague recall of such feelings.

"Don't lead with your heart, child,
it will betray you," she growled me low.
My body talked like it knew what no man
or woman has solved. "How did you
cause this? What was your wrong?"

She smiled me, handsome & hard as
a man now. "When they near you,
child, hooked by your luring blood,
do what I didn't."

Silence. I'd slid to the very edge
of her bed now, disliking her touch.
Naming & counting constellations
in my mind, from the many long
night watches with my father the King.

Silence. Counting. "Sniff."
"Sniff?"
Silence again. Breathing more complex
than it ought. I should have felt
something, at least pity or sorrow.

Her advice lingered, though, a wisdom curled
into it, layers deep, her one gift
to me. Me too young & foolish
to know that sooner or later we all
don the sex box, asses high for
the smacking & cracking, body's pain,
heart's anguish, drag them home,
alone, before first light.

* * * * * *

xxvii. Book of Patterns

Those years in your office, Architect, high in your Tower,
your dank dry dusty Tower office,
the hours I'd spend there nearly every
day, was it teaching, all those words,
all that talking, or somehow better when
you were silent, when I simple studied
the Tangled Gate through the great telescope?

Talking. A voice like a beautiful, old, rusty
pipe, in an abandoned place at dusk.
Words, yes, but meaning less so.
Talking. My younger days' teacher had
talked less & I'd learned more.

"The mind locally, & the world at large,
is *collaboration*. An immense, complex
flow through innumerable vessels, &
there are distinctions."

A pause. I'm too green to wonder, as
I do now, how your words would have
changed if I'd just rent my blouse &
beared my breast to you. Bit you,
hard, fore & aft, with my hungry young mouth.

"The *pairing* is I & thou.
The *working* is three or more.
The *flowing* is a mass movement.
All flowing is all life, all matter."

My younger days' teacher would nuzzle
me with touch, cause us *hmmm* together
for hours, hold strange pictures for me
to study in his soft white-furred paws.
Knew I trebled in time but not why.
Seemed to be showing me iterations of
myself, centuries apart, reaching for
each other, trying, failing, reaching.

"These could be destructive collaborations,
or creative, could be audience to
events, fleeing, sleep. What seems like
clash & chaos is a kind of flow, a deep
improvisation of music & movement."

You showed me, just once, each of my
interations, hand to hand to hand
across time, one & all, & something,
something bright & beautiful, & words,
my own, not yours, "*turn on all the lights,*
you must *turn on all the lights.*"

The lights I knew earliest were the sky's
at night, up this long climb to the Castle
on its tall hill, its great lookouts to the
Wide Wide Sea, & my father's sleepless
patrols so many weaker hours of the
night. Him alone, mine for a little while.

Always looking high, in love with the night's
 shiny stones, I'd start when he'd speak.
"They're all out there." Sleepless too,
 thinking what I beheld like a spectral
canvas of the musical patterns of gulls
 in flight, I'd vaguely ask: "Who?"

But his mind on the Sea below, not
 the speckled roof of the world. "Who would
take all this from us. *Our home.*" I looked
 down below, saw nothing but empty
dark waves. Answered his strange fears
 with my only powers, touch & kiss.

Embraced, sighing, he'd say: "There are
 other worlds, stranger strengths."
Turn on all the lights.

Now come to what he built for me
 later. When I became one of his stranger
strengths. When he saw how I moved
 quick & light, like a bunny, like a butterfly,
& said I must dance.

We sat together so many nights,
 studying an old Book of Patterns
he kept like a treasure, as he kept
 nor treasured little else.
We'd study. I'd dance to imitate. He'd shake
 his head. I'd try again. *The pairing*
is I & thou. Turn on all the lights.

By dreams I'd dance *with them.*
By mornings I'd dance *for him.*

The grounds for the dance'd be raked
 every evening, the stones set in place.
Barest light, touch of water to my lips,
 my gown shed, all alone, all quiet.
I'd dance for his reck, I'd let them come, the patterns
 in the book, traced & tranced through
my dreams of *them*, let my body,
 move my feet, sing the pictures &
noise, move with morning into light.

The rocks would stray from my feet,
 the raked sands scatter the grounds
revealing my song & message. Blind &
 dumb to others watching, pretty
trinkets of the court, not my friends,
 flowers ever drawn to my father's rays.

These grounds now long unraked,
 their purpose long passed from naked eyes.
My feet too soft & unpracticed to turn on
 any lights, pair, work, work, flow,
improvise music or movement.

I've returned here, Architect,
 to remember some things, find my
old music, the dangers I knew then
 because I loved & wanted many,
because they loved & wanted me.

* * * * * *

xxviii. Brother

We continued our talks, my dear Brother,
 long after that day we last all stood
together in this old Castle's great entryway.
 Shiny then, polished high & low,
like a thing thought worth more than the rest
 of this Woods'd Island.

You'd let me brush your long blonde hair
 that morning, my small ivory brush
loving familiar with your head's curves
 & contours. The sound of your slow,
enjoying breath. Your ever wish me
 talk of my Creatures friends long
after I'd last seen them. Your wish
 I'd reunion with whatever childly
magic had gifted them me.

Long after that last day, in that place
 beyond dreams, we'd find each other, &
you would again ask after the White Bunny,
 cackling little Imp, turtle not a turtle,
& the rest. Knew my stories with them
 as none other did. Nudge our dream
visits ever nearer that hole in my
 bedroom wall.

"They miss you, my sweet Sister. They love
you like none other."
"*I miss you*."
Quiet. *Brush, brush, brush.*

"Would you come with me?"
"I wish. I can't."
"*Like dreams & death have strict
rules of engagement?"*

He'd laugh. *Loving me.*

The shine here now are those gapes
in the walls high up. Like the very
angry blows of a very great Beast.
*Breathe the air we all breathe!
See by the common light! Let it
reveal your tangled, choking hearts!*

That day you were off to the Mainland,
the Island's sole participant in
the Great Games, you confident you'd
confound them all & win many prizes
in tests of speed, strength, grace,
wit, voice, sex, diplomacy. Your sweet,
soft, thorough confidence. The pretty
trinkets gathered in peering corners
as we all bid you well, them damp & weak
at your indifference.

The King my father distracted by his
own secrets, hand absently holding
the Queen's, her a magic bone's obscure
vessel. The Architect, tall & dusty &
looking rustily pried from his Tower offices.
My sorry self, your dearest one,
abandoned by you, hating you,
terrified I wouldn't see you again by daylight.

Your smile the same for all of us,
for the damp trinkets, & in it
I saw you again as sickly & small, sleeping
too many hours, *hmmming* many many
of them. Growing graceful in face,
strong shoulders, swift thighs. Growing
graceful, & slightly off. Occasional limp.

It came & went, as you did many
nights, as I knew your deeper
explorings into the Woods than
anyone else, as you would not
let me come, & would tell me little,
twinkling with your own secrets.

"You will know in your own time,
sweet Sister."
"I would know now if you just
told me."

The stone staircase to our rooms
is rubbled but intact. Your room
is ruin, filled to its broken doorway.
Mine, strangely, is empty, & clear.
I sit in the detritus where was
my too-big bed. Where I brushed
your hair for the thousandth time
that last morning.

"Will you tell them goodbye for me?"
I nod. Useless to argue.
"They still wait you." I start but
keep brushing.

"Even the last time we, I saw you
then, that limp. What was it?"
He says nothing but I flash sudden in
this place beyond dreams to a
half-lit cave, a face of many faces,
a voice braided by all.

I lie out my bed roll, my ivory
hairbrush, my totems, my knife.
On the ceiling above me remain a few
of the golden stars we pinned there,
you & I, my brother, so long ago,
one traced in green on its edges.

"Ours, sweet Sister. Wherefrom. Whereto."
I watch our star again, my dear Brother,
eyes open, want you in waking
again. *I know nothing.*

I sleep.

* * * * * *

xxix. The Gate

All memories until now with
the tough old bite they still bear,
but my wander now turns to
new purpose, to why come here again.
My Dancing Grounds are cold & silent
of counsel or enigma as I leave them.

The Tangled Gate is impossibly large,
like there had been & yet remains
only one King of this world, like it
will share your attention with none other.
In my childly dreams I felt possessed
of it, a thing blessed by its complete rule.

You, Architect, would not let me pass
through it by waking, gave me to believe
I *could not* pass through it but for your nod.
I believed there were reasons, believed
this nod would come when me ready,
believed I apprenticed by dreams to
its unimagined, wild, waking wonders.

I breathe once, twice, not not move to
enter. Look up at your massive height,
the palpable *hmmming* music I hear
now as I did then in dreams, deep sense
you are not crafted from metal but
caused into being by bone, by wood, by rock.

Where you arch highest, that glowing
apex, words to read & wonder. "*For those
lost*," I read, again & again, as I did then,
no entry into this riddle. *For those lost.*
Someone read those words to me
the first time I saw them. So small.

In my chamber, through the hole in the wall
in my dreams. Yes, it was strange.
Yes, I was small. Yes, it felt real like
important & beautiful things in
this world are real. Yes, this belief wears
& wearies my mind. Yes, it's why I've returned.

Breathe once, twice, now move to enter.
Again, though waking, the sense of being
possessed, of being *swallowed*. Was this
why my lonely, fleeing, hiding life
more than all else? Why I left you
Creatures? Why I left you, Architect?

Come to the great Fountain that greets
all, insists a drink. This too grown
from world itself, not crafted by
men's hands? It looks more fallen,
though, yet burbles frothy, yet still
insists a drink.

Not a drink but a decision:
left or right? A crux to distinct
paths, each a phantom gesturing
hand, inviting, encouraging.
Which way to find you, Architect?
Are you really waiting me?

For a short ever or more I stand
here, far from home, stupid with
tough old bites of memories, of griefs.
I try to remember, claw into my heart
for its deep wounds & stars. The cold sky
bends me lower, I breathe twice, I let,
I release.

My hands cup a drink, ever like
the remembering I claim to seek.
Splash my face, arms, *remember,*
remember, now go.

Left. I choose left, my Blue Suitcase
in hand again. I choose it not
because I know, but because among
those tough old bites of memory
there is something sweet still, a whisker,
a sniffing nose. Soft fur. *There.*

* * * * * *

xxx. Trebles in Time

I feel you spying upon me, young girl
 I was, that great spyglass you
sat at those years in the Architect's
 Tower office window. I am one of the
distant moving figures you can't quite reck,
 hurrying a vines-&-stones-lined path
you cannot go but in dreams.

I, we, treble in time, seeing through
 each other's eyes, feeling oddly how
we share not-quite-same bodies, me knowing
 what happened next & next & next to
I, we, but you with the live little details
 of life lived here then. My fewer years
then, brighter, mysterious, hungrier because
 appetites still new, yet unquenched by disappointment.

I feel again the too-low shaky stool I sat on
 to use the spyglass, awkward half lean
into it, & too heavy to move much. My dreams
 of that Gate down there half-learning me
its elusive, slow, kinetic movements, half
 fooling me into seeing what wasn't there.
Refused distinction between waking & dream.

Your lectures rare & obscure, more eruptions
 of thought reacting to your books, whatever
you were chasing in those ancient thin leaves.
 Silence, nor the kind encouraging questions.
Even simple, local ones, like: *what are those*
 faces in the column along the winding stairs
up to here? Some crying out, yet some smiling?
 Some not human or known animal?

So I'd study the innards of the Tangled Gate,
 its branching roots, shadowed-out mysteries.
I'd study you down there, me, looking back
 up at you, us looking further along our
path, ruling in unknown castles, grown &
 wetly coupling handsome men. Then—

Voices behind me, noises, I turn.
 A branch pokes up through the roof,
a speeding patch of stars visible.
 We open my mouth but tis the King my
father crying out, angry, against the
 Architect, waving off his plea.
Long words, somehow clung to bark & earth.

I watch you watching me still as he
 carries you away, forbids me return.
Like my friends in the tunnels &
 Great Cavern in my dreams had tried
to forbid me. Yet we dreamed me on here,
 didn't we? Dreamed me deeper than
any had ever gone. Dreamed me return
 despite promises to King, to my friends.

They forbid me too, begged me really,
 my love for them their only power
to protect me. Our last banquet, so many
 present to honor my birthday. I shake
my head. Like my father, cruel.

I see the day you I returned, years past,
 still those faces in the column, still
the Architect & his old tomes. Only difference
 is his slight sniff as I pass his great table.
Only difference I can move the spyglass
 now some. Only difference that I lean
to accept that waking & dream are not
 always two. *All flowing is all life,*
all matter. Sniff. Hmmmmmm.

* * * * * *

xxxi. Flight

There are places yet this world that
 do not dream & wake as two.
Some of them like pockets of perfection,
 clear globules falling a long long ever
from sky to world.

Yet what of one when falls & strikes?
 What is the fallout from smashed
globular perfection? The Boy I found
 in The Tangled Gate was one.

He had not lived in the perfection
 but was more clumsily contrived from
a later dream. Given the flesh
 of old sad memories over his clear frail bones.

He was hungry when I found him, terrified
of me, neither quite Beast nor Boy really.
I fed him from my Blue Suitcase, what
I carried these long perambles through the
Gate, when maps & dream studies would
leave me growling drily for meat.

He studied the Suitcase's color, calmed,
his eyes a like color of the sky's, though
I thought him half-blind. I fed him &
he followed me, a scrawny touch-starved
mongrel. Touch how we talked eventually,
or *hmmming* when he felt brave.

His terrors not of me, nor the Gate
we traveled, but the voices, distant
voices, not words, more clicks & noises.
He let us listen together, & they smoothed,
they too now *hmmm*'d. First language
of the world, made its first songs. A balm
to all, a conduit, we listened, then
smiled & understood.

They had brought me to him, & now
I would take him. Give him more
than distant memories of the smash
to know & love. He would go with me
but leave the Island too. This world
perhaps. It wasn't his home.

I taught him the human tongue.
He lived with me in the Tower, &
I schooled him, how to release those
old voices, but also how to keep them
in moments too, steer by through
many worlds. Many Gates.

A day came when the King arrayed
all on the Island to take the Mainland.
A threat he could no longer abide, no matter
the distance. He commanded every boy
& man clapped in steel. I would not
sacrifice this boy of frail bones &
sad flesh-dreams.

I let him forget his nature to live
by earth, below sky, apart from Sea.
Let him forget what he was not as
we needed a special entrance to the
Gate, unknown by King, best unknown
by him.

I let him return to that lost
globule of perfection, of which him
a wistful echo, return there, no
waking, no dream; no land, no sky;
no earth, no Sea; all welcome
everywhere; we flew many places
that day. Borderless worlds of
trees & mountains, many & one
Sea. Many faces, many loves, &
one Sea.

When the sun approached its fiercest
hour, I signalled him rise & rise
to its light, rise & rise, remember
& forget, love & let go, *love & let go.*

He burst as though feathers
blowing wide from wax, a forever
moment, burning, beautiful. He touched
my mind & said goodbye. I dreamed,
for years, of his final plunge,
perfect sexless body.

All I had taught him, what
he would learn, like a boy, like a son.
But no, I am a man from the stars,
not this world's beautiful Sea.
I am alone. I build. I am alone.

* * * * * *

xxxii. Rags & Flower Vases

Mind & world is collaboration, I learned
this so long ago I forget it was taught me.
I forget I was once a luckless young man
from nowhere special.

I am alone. I build. I am alone.

But 't'weren't always so. Once, friendless,
 on a far world of men from this one,
I attended university & learned nothing.
 Knew I was marked for ritual ending.

There were no helpless runts, no sodden workmen,
 no rich parasites. One distinguished
by a certain age a talent, a gift, a special
 contribution, or one was done. It didn't
hurt. It wasn't negotiable.

Once our men & women too grew from
 spasm & spit, awkward twist of toros,
fevered collide of breast & pelvis, the prick
 a catalytic bomb, suddenly, the cunt
its sought for & resisted & sought for
 planting ground.

How did we finally stop? Was it
 the wisdom desperation contrives
with a conceding cry? Then & there,
 as now & here, I sought the oldest
books, the frailest rememberers.

It was hunger, broken air, blackened
 water, sickness. It was purge & pogrom.
Science, autocracy. Rejection of kings
 & blood power. Of coin as world's river.
Tribe over state. Race over kin.
 Gift, talent, skill over any birthright.

I had nothing. Tall but not strong.
 Crooked voice, clumsy, shy. Well meaning.
Neither the freshest plumb of a girl
 nor the shiniest slice of a sex artist,
nor two, nor several, nor binds,
 nor blood, nor whispers or screams,
could make me cum but a dribble.

Book-read but not wise, little able
 to interpret nor compose, play,
paint. Without the violence nor brilliance
 in my heart to insist upon myself.
I would be melt back for limbs &
 flesh, a few pieces studied for lessons.

Why they came to me, I do not know.
Why they ignited my sleep, fired
its skies with dreams, re-constructed
me from my dullest depths, I do
not know. Maybe I was one of
many. Maybe they found so little
I was clear land to build upon.

I began to dream. As never before,
& I became someone else. They needed
me to build, to learn to build
by my own world's best lights.
To read its oldest books on building,
walk slow & humble by its longest
rememberers. At university I
learned to build structures great
& small. Till I felt glad & familiar
with molecule, temple, volcano,
supernova. I began to build in dreams.

I built them Gates in dreams,
& planted these Gates far & wide
in the reaches of space. Beacons,
for refuges. Built them till one day
I left them, left my world, flung
myself whole through dreaming
to the farthest point on one of those worlds.

For a long while my mind was wounded,
much of it in shadows, & I found
myself wanting to help this strange
world I had come to.

I learned of you, Princess, in ways
I cannot recall, & came back
through time & space to where you
first dwelled. On an Island.
Near the Tangled Gate. Beloved
daughter of a King. Not of this
world's people. Sent here by my
old Dream-masters.

Kept to your chambers, singing
 to rags & flower vases, dreaming
of the Gate before you ever see it.
 I watch you, Princess, let the King
your father choose me as your teacher.
 Your brother dead by the King's
blood locutions with a far enemy,
 you are delivered to me to protect,
 to teach.

I will become the answer to a question
 you didn't have, it will consume us both.
Across stars & centuries, we will ask this question.

* * * * * *

xxxiii. My Gate

I built the Gate of many layers,
 inscrutable to others. I wanted
a powerful thing to endure out
 the passing kings & rulers & slavers
of men. I wished it to last until
 the men of many worlds resolved
enduring peace among them, or
 let their power fade for something
else, something better.

In its marrow the blood of dreams,
 their powerful, perpetual soft clay.
Its bones the roots of ancient trees
 which hold creation up from far below.
Its muscle that of interstellar travel
 by a thought's intent.

Then I built in to it . . . someone else.
 I was a young, lonely man, & let
my lorn heart & hard cock contrive
 a canker in the Tangled Gate.

Her hand on mine to open & close
 a first & last time.
A dream of love, a dream of perfection.
 How Emandia thought to live
forever, when the worlds ran out.

I would chase you through worlds
like these, find myself a man
again, having to walk through years &
sweat. Each world its own experiment,
its own possibility of perfection.

And mine to suss you out across
centuries & lands. Find what you
might be this time. Not knowing
your role in the world, what I
contrived for you. You would choose
our way, on or out, each time.

But, still, this first time, you a
Princess, your father the King
& a war he has lost. A retreat to
an Island, yet not a retreat.
Your numbers a few hundred,
many more lost, & yet now amicably
allowed an old boat to Sea?

A hard & handsome man, you tasked
me to build you an Island Kingdom,
or at least the appearance of one.
What mattered you was not
your Castle, nor the Tower you
insisted I needed.

It was the Gate! My Tangled Gate
on this world. It was thus
I learned how we three—Architect,
Princess, Gate—would ever draw near
to each other over centuries & miles.

And your father the King, his
steel grey eyes upon me. Nearing shore.

"Find out how to wield it.
Find a way to recover her."

* * * * * *

xxxiv. Twice Believe

The world settles in the bones.
Dissonance becomes rhythm.
Flow shifts. Flow *others.*

I find myself in one world,
 among the colors of its men's movements.
The contents sort out so, & so.

Island. Castle. Tower. Gate.
Architect. Princess. King.

This playful, curious, musical game
 of yours. Knowing, not knowing.

I always convince myself it's something
 more, something else, something
other. You are smiling lure.

Yes, I am the Architect.
Yes, I architect by dreams.
Yes, you are not a dream.
Yes, I chase you perpetually.

I reck beyond recking,
 look beyond seeing,
 listen to what I can't hear,
 reach, induce, reach, induce.

You ever want me to say me & why.
You ever want a note, an image, a word.

I first appear to you in the Gate as
 an invitation to believe. Your dreams
of this place are still new, a game
 you half-remember by morning,
seeing as you've been trained to see.

There is no hole in your bedchamber's wall.
There is. I invite you to accept
 two truths about one thing.

But, better to say me & why—
But, better some note, image, words—

A thing that *hmmms* in place.
Hmmms to steady. *Hmmms* to flow.

However this world causes such a
 thing to be, this hummingbird,
tis note, tis image, tis words.

Your picture book thus tells the ancient
 story many worlds tell of.
The hummingbird gave men music
 & taught them to sing.

You memorize the words, the whys,
 the promise of remembering a lost song
& flying away. You breathe this book
 through many days, memorize its
pages & story like your own eyes & skin.

I am the Architect.
I architect by dreams.
You are not a dream.

One spring day, you return to your
 paints & large sheets, your persistence
to Princess girl's form, & discover to be
 no Hummingbird on your page, as
though never made. Waking next morning,
 you discover it flitting upon your
  chamber well, as though always.

Still later, moved again, the Queen's
 half-wild garden.

You & this world, Princess, contrive
 between you that which may be.

An invitation to believe, twice
 believe, there is a hole through
your bedchamber wall, but only
 in your dreams.

A Princess girl kind of game.
Tis there. Tisn't. You ask your friends
 behind the wall too, but
they do not know what a Hummingbird
 is; strangely, do not care to try.

I let you but one. World settling
 in the bones. Dissonance, rhythm.
How what brightens the eye, greens
 the leap, caps the peak, blues
  the sky, cleans, clears, calms.

You are walking the path in
 the Tangled Gate to a place
you call the Carnival Room.
 Cosmic Princess games.

You are again singing the Hummingbird's song,
how one day mankind will remember
its first song, & fly away.

As you make the last turn,
I appear before you, set upon the air.

You gasp. You look. I am my question
to you. *This is your test.*

You hold out your finger to me,
half-smiling. Forgetting worlds
I haven't made, will now never
know, I accept. You walk along now,
just the potent of touch, no note,
no image, no word.

I am *hmmm*ing for you, as we wake,
as we continue in our separate
bedchambers, mine dark with
dream's weird depths, yours plush
with new playful light. We each now know.
We both now twice believe.

* * * * * *

xxxv. Say Me, & Why

I want you to remember some things.
Think me deeper discovered, unfolded more
than my baffling lectures, endless scholarly
mutterings. I let you solitary hours in my
Tower office while I tend to the boy's lessons
in his room below.

My record of the time beyond time, its cloaked
text unlocked in chosen fragments for your curious sneakings.
Your touch on the pages makes them glow
to mine eyes alone.

You found, you read: "The storms became constant,
vengefully violent. The daily life of men
& markets, ideologies more partners in power
than combatants, churches & temples
vaguely explaining their fences & roofs to
the cattle within, new seers smiling fresh
with hoary ancient visions of men waking
to their common blood, mortality, & fanged
need for love, was over."

So much I architected about your Island
 home than just the Tangled Gate.
Your father the King I thought hobbled
 by my promise I could harness the Gate
to recover his lost Queen Deirdre. Just time
 to smack & crack open this magick device,
& the need to fend off those that would
 contrive to take it from him.

You read: "What remained for most was
 the leash & a stingy bowl at nightfall.
Hope was a little more light in the day's
 grey sky, less snaggling wind at night.
Where possibility still lay, at least for a few,
 was far below ground, in the great darkened
halls of the Sleepers, thousands of them,
 fed by tubes & awake few or no hours at all."

I assured your youth's solitude, your need for me,
 by a travel your father the King never
knew true. A peaceful Island Kingdom. My visit
 to threaten my King's invasion if their
King's unringed daughter not offered as
 tribute. As slave. My King then compelled to marry
her like a peace treaty with an enemy
 he'd never met. *Safeguard the Gate.*

You read: "The men of science, magick, &
 spirit had joined with the men of Art
to contrive a solution. What remained unfouled
  of the Sea & mountains & Woods had been
blended into this work, not to save the world
 but to undo it, find the place beyond
the Dreaming, by scavenging through history
 for the clue all believed was there,
the thread out of time."

You danced for your father the King
 because of the *Book of Patterns* I'd given
him, the one I told him could help me
 smack & crack the Gate. Convinced him
that studying this book with you by night,
 saturating your mind with cloaked gnatterings,
recording the messages your frenzied
 dancing's next morning would produce,
would help us in our urgent work.

You read: “If this all sounds lunatic, or a beautiful
plan but far too late, or you dubious
wonder that such diverse men were able
to work together even at the end, you are
right, you have read well. The minds of men
did not contrive this plan, but others
whose own world had been lost. They had tried
& failed to convince, to help, for centuries,
& it wasn’t working now. More Sleepers would
wake up dead, or simply disappear.”

I simply disappeared, through the
Dreaming, where I later summoned you back
to the Island, to me, to remember
some things, to decide this world’s open
or closed arc.

All those years I forbid you waking
traverse of the Gate, caused your King
believe a book of locked click-clicks & noise-
noises interpreted by dream dancing’s,
slaved a girl to his unwelcoming bed
that he would be hobbled by his unhappy
unsatings, were my great fool’s strategem
to both harden & soften your heart
for our decision.

It’s time to remember some things,
this how I will say me, & why.
We are both in the Tangled Gate now,
& nearing. I can sniff you true
a thousand light years away, & yet
you now merely a few turns away from me.

* * * * * *

xxxvi. The Dreamers

The Dreamers at the end of history
could not travel beyond the Dreaming
as I did. The best of them could vividly
visit places & times past, travel history
like shadows unseen at night.
They would drink the foul potions,
climb into their Capsules, scatter
through centuries & lands, report
back the hidden details, reasons
for decisions hidden behind locked
doors, coded into pronouncemnts by
kings, presidents, popes, caesars.

What they found, what they seemed
 to discern, was morass, not
pattern. Lives of men governed
 as much by chance as by will.
By blood's strange inheritance, &
 the way desires twist the mind's heart,
& deepen, & half-rabid survive the years.
 Shell after shell, a man balmed &
bruised into a larger, less thing wearing
 the shackles of his years, like experience
is not some but all, his only well by
 which to gaze at the world, judge
& praise & damn it by. That small
 reflection down there, his own face
half-obscuring the reflected scrap of sky
 he willing to see.

Wars fought over land, women, cankerous
 want for power & control in a world that
buries or blows to breeze every last man
 & his great Castle, every pauvre & his cup,
every God-thing & its statues & its followers
 & its very name. No peace in body,
no peace in stillness, no peace in
 coupling, no peace in the widest
Woods or deepest Sea. Striving, seeking,
 arguing, grappling, owning, aging, falling.

More Dreamers joined the early few,
 & their potions grew stronger, &
a kind of messianic ethic took grip
 of their work. They slept more
hours of each day, surrendered
 loves & lives for this obsession.
Forgotten, eventually, by those above
 who had sent them. Powerful &
desperate men building greater edifices
 over dead soil, ranging greater armies
against each other, queering mortal terrors
 into frenzied faiths.

I walked above, under constant grey
 skies, through prison camps &
electronic virtual paradises. I looked
 for hope. I found none. I found
that men had never built their
 great civilizations or religions or
 shiniest metropolises on hope,
but a savage fear of their short
 hard trail from nothing to nothing.

Where hope lay in tending
 every injured soul, mending
every damaged body,
 becoming humble scholar in
the ways of the green, of dreams,
 of music braiding mine to yours
to everyone's, someone with a weapon
 or a fist or a remembered slight
would slam down, *& hard, & again,*
 until faith in the world rooted
not in what that open door might
 goodly yield, but how to barricade
it against all but a cherished few.

Not morass or pattern but a kind
 of willful suffering, explained
at length, justified in blood,
 molded into life as a passage
through a test to somewhere
 finer, not built by men; a somewhere
else where a cosmic paternal hand
 could solely wield justice &
reward; or a cycle of simply being
 alive & mortal could be broken;
or a box in the ground, & a cease
 to all the unanswered questions.

We are approaching each other
 now, Princess, & I see you
carry the Blue Suitcase I gave you,
 & I see you never change through
all the centuries from then
 back to now. It's time for us to
meet again, to decide.

I shudder as you pause & kick the green
 & golden leaves at your feet, as
your breathing now quicks to me close,
 as my breathing now does too,
as we finally meet again.

* * * * * *

Jimmy Heffernan

Notes on Cultural Evolution

"Now, that might raise the question of what kind of *freedom* there is for the person. As long as we are in the system, there is very little freedom. You can say 'I do what I want', but what you want is the result of the system. We are wanting things which are incoherent and creating misery.
And we're not free to give that up."
—David Bohm, *Thought as a System*

"Technology, or the historical momentum of things, is creating such a bewildering social milieu that the monkey mind cannot find a simple story, a simple creation myth or redemption myth to lay over the crazy contradictory patchwork of profane techno-consumerist post-McLuhanist electronic pre-apocalyptic existence. Into that dimension of anxiety created by this inability to parse reality rushes a bewildering variety of squirrelly notions, epistemological cartoons if you will. Conspiracy theory, in my humble opinion, is a kind of epistemological cartoon about reality."
—Terence McKenna

The human cultural matrix is a system far smarter and more powerful than any individual human or group of individuals. That is why it is in command of human affairs, and humans are not. It has been this way since before the dawn of civilization. We think we're at the helm. We're not. There are far more subtle and more fundamental forces at work in human affairs than the decisions of anyone or any group. Conspiracy theories are seen to be irrelevant.

We're passengers on a train and we do not lay down the tracks. We cannot even see out of the windows. The system is far more complex than and so far removed from human control that our beliefs about things really are a sort of sick tragedy.

And when we're no longer needed as the host for the evolution of memes, Nature will discard us. The only way to kill this cultural organism is for humanity to become extinct. Nature is using us. Humans are merely unwitting pawns in the real action, which is memetic and cultural. It is an operation on an entirely different level, and almost everybody is totally blind to it. Nature's goals through cultural evolution are more important for it than human lives are. The evolutionary push now is toward Artificial Intelligence.

* * *

There are forces at work on this planet that are quite invisible, and extremely powerful. Human culture is like a giant organism, and individuals are very small cells within that organism. Or culture is the brain and individuals are like individual neurons. Or one could liken it to a machine. Culture is a huge mechanism, and individual humans are like minor cogs in the overall mechanical process. This machine operates on what to us would be a decidedly abstract level, and yet it drives all of the human affairs of Earth.

The evolution—the adoption, mutation, and selection—of memes—an element of a culture or system of behavior that may be considered to be passed from one individual to another by nongenetic means, especially imitation—is the essence of what is happening. Everything in human society, every thought and almost every behavior, is shaped and in many cases decided by the greater cultural evolution. The cog is quite unaware of his place in the machine, or even what the machine is really doing. It all takes place in human minds, yet is far greater in its overall networked projection than any individual or group of individuals. Human choice has absolutely nothing to do with it.

* * *

A form of abstract progress, complexification, may or may not be going on in Nature, but progress on a human level is a meme specific to our civilization and is not objective. How do you know progress is even happening? Sure, technological "progress" is occurring, but how do we know how this will affect the destiny of man himself? It could be very deleterious in the long run. So that wouldn't really be progress.

And it seems to me that the only objective measure of progress in human societies is the development of the level of happiness overall. With all of this complex technology, are humans really any happier than they were fifty years ago? *A hundred, two hundred years ago?* I think a lot of people would say that *no, we're not.*

There's a lot of misery associated with modern society. So how can we be said to have progressed? The notion that progress is necessarily happening on a level meaningful for human beings and their most central interests is a cultural bias that most of us don't even think about. More complex does not necessarily mean "better." Instead of using the word "progress," perhaps we should instead substitute the word "development," in order to shed some of the baggage.

* * *

Cultural differences exist not only in categorically familiar areas like customs, beliefs, and languages but, much more importantly and fundamentally, in the very configuration of consciousness, due to basic potential differences in the wiring of the brain itself. The perception of the world of a 2018 AD New Yorker is virtually alien to that of a Tibetan monk of 950 AD, and even more so to a Plains Indian of 500 BC. If you were somehow able to teleport between these various nervous systems, I think it can be said that you might not even know they were all the same species.

It has been shown that the human brain is easily plastic enough for such variation. The cultural realm—the sphere of human thought—is not ordinarily considered to be so vital. Everyone just assumes everything is an epiphenomenon of genetics. And you can't really fault them; it's what the scientific community has fostered. But the connectivity of the brain is vastly complex, and allows for any behavior and any perception one can possibly imagine. Everyone thinks cultural differences are merely morphologies on a theme of some ill-defined human nature. But Human nature itself is not fixed. And neither is perception, or consciousness.

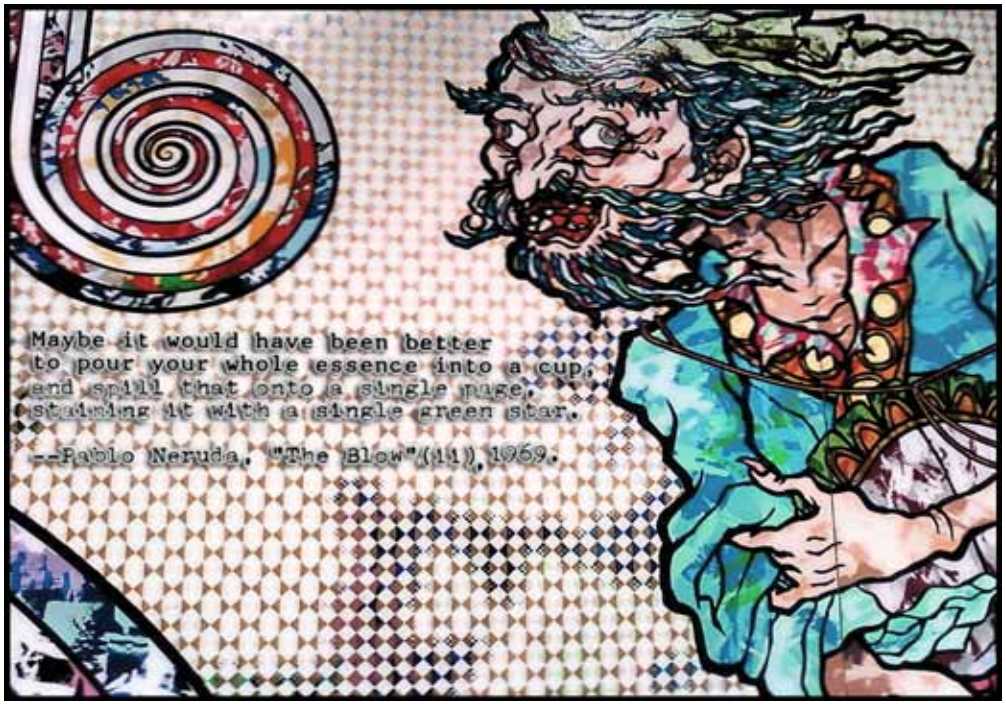
* * *

The primary reason for the malaise, despair, and loneliness of the modern age appears to be a consequence of a basic split with our evolutionary heritage. For most of our time on this planet, humanity has not suffered from all of the dysfunctions of the modern age, such as the proliferation of murder, rape, crime, suffering, want, insular ideologies, shabby institutions, and many other tragic social and cultural failures.

Our ideologies and institutions can be quite stifling, and often constitute almost total malfunction, and this, coupled with a sedentism that goes wholly against our heritage of roughly 200,000 years, has led to a break with the genetic necessities specific to our species. This leads to a marked loneliness that, while not often talked about, is a symptom of a cultural bankruptcy and lack of sufficiency to provide for all members of the community of life which, until very recently in geological/evolutionary time, was being done more or less because of necessity, which preserved diversity, and which of course is a fundamental attribute of a healthy ecosystem.

I would venture to reiterate what so many people have said, and that is that the current constitution of modern civilized societies eliminates virtually all forms of diversity. While it may be possible for humanity to survive the onslaught of this war on diversity with such high-tech and successful agricultural practices, it will simply not do to let this go on to destroy billions of years of evolution in the virtual blink of an eye. *Do we have to wait until life on our planet is no longer worth living?*

* * * * * *


Maybe it would have been better
to pour your whole essence into a cup,
and spill that onto a single page,
staining it with a single green star.
--Pablo Neruda, "The Blow"(11), 1969.

Colin James

Doppelgängers are Butt Precautionists

The reclusive criminologist
was flown, in parts, from his
remote Yorkshire farm.

An almost silent drone arrived first,
carrying his head and some arm.

Next, half of his torso. It's his buttocks
that weighed a lot. His were huge, immense.
Many years of solitude and thought
had deprived his moribund body.

They put him back together carefully
even trimming a bit of the fat.

A blood tomato was cooked slowly
to reenact the fairly simple case.
He identified the garlic as Croatian.
The oil was from an isle near Greece.

He refused to acknowledge his surgeons,
shook hands only with the caterer,
who possessed a felicitous familiarity,
and a healthy supply of Super Tuscan Reds.

* * *

Erotic Tremors: The Auburn Abbreviations

Joe was not tongue-tied.
"Let's call a blow job a blow job."

He administrated Gauloises
rolled up inside t-shirt shoulders.

Fewer hummingbirds than usual this year,
most ambushed during their migration
by South American praying mantises.

Such a ferocious taste for brain keeps
all of us constantly on the lookout.

* * *

Decadence Owed

It rained during the night,
my accountant was unavailable.

His secretary referred me to
a descendant of that Hungarian actress
who played the Werewolf's mother
in all those old horror films.

I took the coastal highway
which was pleasantly diverting.
Her caravan stood adjacent to
an erosion-affected cliff.

A horse was grazing in a shaded copse.
Colored streamers fluttered in the wind.

She was selling, the sign said.
Her psychological item deduction
had become a thing of legend.

There was a green carpet
on the wooden steps. Strings
of drying herbs, garlic, and whatnot.

The claw marks on the door
attempts of an Oedipus fatalist
to check off the right box.

* * * * * *

Bags Endo News
No. 293 Junee 10, 20000
Editor: Algernon Beagle
King: Sheila Bunny
Written Down By: Lori Bunny

A Nuw Frend Vizits Bagzend!

Yor olde pal Algernon beleevz the beezt waye too trodd throo thiz strang werld iz too put mah beegeboye jernelizts hat on strayt, wach ~~keep a look~~ owt 4or big gyz with crazy dangerus Konfuzing plans, an keep mah pawz klumping stedyley 4orwerd. I lik mah shar of huge an kises an smils frum nis gys lik Mees Chrees an Princes Cris9 an the Blondys who beleev huge an kindness in general ar the beezt ~~plan not a~~ payment not part of the plan. But mozTley I jest lik too rit mah nuwzpapr an pay attenshun too smart older gyz an go hav a good mol or to ~~sleep~~ in mah comfy cher on Milns' Porch waching the sun go down.

Bags End News
No. 294 June 17, 20000.
Editor: Algernon Beagle
King: Sheila Bunny
Written Down By: Lori Bunny

Edger B. Baer Vizits Bagzend!

Lazt tim I told about how thiz gy namd Edger B. Baer rited me a strang letr he sed he liked mah nuwzpapr I think an he waz gona kom vizit Bagzend somtim. I am glad he liks mah nuwspapr but the mor I thawt abowt him viziting the mor jitery I got.

I meen it he iz a nis gy an awl I waz weryd about how som of the triky big gys lik Betsee Buny Pillo wood look at him an think "Awl min! Thatz wat som big gyz ar lik us litel gys ar jest pashuTley wating around 4or owr lukky charz too help thayr plan! Yah, rit, but itz troo.

Or mebee that litel big gy Sargint

Bags End News
No. 295 June 24, 20000
Editor: Algernon Beagle
King: Sheila Bunny
Written Down By: Lori Bunny

Bagzend At Itz Bezt an Werst

I nevr reelly nowd that som gy I nevr met far frum Bagzend wood reed mah nuwzpapr abolt an lik it an get the brit ideer in hiz hed that he wood lik too vizit Bagzend an meet me an seey Bagzend 4or himself.

I had jest frogged that mah nuwzpapr waz red biy miy frends in Bagzend an uthr plasis lik Ozz an Narnea, an uf corse mah enemees looking 4or reezunz too kum around with theer trouns an theer big dum plans.

But then this smart gy namd Edger B. Baer rited too me an so it iz troo about mah nuwzpapr beeing red in plases unown biy strangrs.

Bags End Book #9:
Edgar B. Bear Visits Bags End!

This story and more Bags End writings
can be found at: www.scriptorpress.com/bags-end.pdf

Hello Cenacle readers,

Mah name is Algernon Beagle & I am the editor guy for Bags End News. Bags End News is a newspaper about mah homeland, a fantasyland called Bags End.

From the outside, Bags End looks like 3 brown-colored laundry bags piled up on a little chair in the corner of our friend Miss Chris's bedroom in Connecticut. Miss Chris is 5 years old & has a toy tall boy brother named Ramie, who is 17.

Inside, Bags End is sort of like an apartment building of levels but, cuz it is a fantasyland, nobody knows about its top or bottom. Most levels look like regular hallways, with doors to rooms & other places running up & down their lengths.

Each level is connected to the one above & the one below by ramps that are good for folks with legs & others without. Strangely, the other end of each level ends in a sudden edge, so be warned, should you come to visit.

The Cenacle editor guy, who is a cousin to my friend & Miss Chris's brother Ramie, invited me to share some of the stories from mah newspaper, now & again. He also helped with the typing & some of the spellings, to make this book presentable here. I love English but I still don't spell it too great.

Anyway, I hope you enjoy these stories from Bags End, a place near & dear to mah heartbone.

******

A New Friend Visits Bags End!

Your old pal Algernon believes the best way to trod through this strange world is to put mah Beagleboy reporter's fedora on straight, watch out for big guys with crazy dangerous confusing plans, & keep mah paws clumping steadily 4orward. I like mah share of hugs & kisses & smiles from nice guys like Miss Chris & Princess Chrisakah & the Blondys 3, who all believe that kindness is the best payment, not part of some tricksy plan.

But mostly I just like to write mah newspaper & pay attention to smart older guys, & go have a good mull or 2 in mah comfy armchair on Milne's Porch, while watching the sun go down.

I usually don't think about how Bags End News gets made into many copies & sent to fantasylands & other strange places all over. Most Bags End guys read mah newspaper like it's mah fault, & they look 4or themselves in it, & when they are in it, they complain even more if I don't treat their antics

like heroic feets. Some guys like Betsy Bunny Pillow the fluffy & mean don't even got feets! Haha. I told a funny.

Me & Lory Bunny, who is Sheila's older smart sister who Sheila calls Brains but I don't make the newspaper, & then we go to the Bags End Post Office & General Store to see Postmistress Elayn El about making copies & mailing them.

I don't go into the Post Office cuz it is full of possible food stuffs. O! Yuk! Lory adjusts her smart guy spectacles & smiles payment not plan at me, & hops into the Store with the new Bags End News in a folder to see Missus El, who looks like a pink elephant but is much smaller.

Sometimes mah silly Bumping brother Alexander Puppy comes with us with his silly smiling it's-all-good-even-the-bad-parts face & his strange one word Bump language. He waits with me like I asked & talks Bump to me like I am listening. If I am lucky, that nice green-eyed Ally Leopard is there to tell me what silly things Alex is saying to me.

If I'm lucky. Ha! Another funny.

So Lory goes into the Store & Missus El takes the newspaper & mails it to Princess Crissy in Imagianna, who smiles her tricky Princess smile to make many copies & mail them. All with a smile. I don't know. Some can. Some can even better.

Well, the last time this all happened, Lory came out with a letter 4or me, & it wasn't the usual complaint or threat from some disgruntled Bags End big guy.

"Bump!" said Alex, helping the way sneezes usually help.

Ally Leopard wasn't around & Lory explained she knows only a few words of Bump.

"A few words of a one word language? Lory, doth thee seek to annihilate mah very sanity?" I demanded. Then I really wished for Ally to tell me what I had just said.

Alex said, "Bump?" again & looked serious 4or him, which 4or most is goofball summer night.

Lory took out her little notebook, & adjusted her smart guy spectacles & writed some things down. She & Alex talked Bump some more & it nearly drove me C R A Z Y when Alex said Bumps r e e e e e e a a a a a a l y s l o w l y & Bumped her r e e e e e e a a a a a a l y s l o w l y like that helped!

Lory nodded & looked at me. "Alex says, 'chill out, you'll live longer.'"

Hoo boy! Yes sir.

So we then all tramped with mah letter to Milne's Porch, which is located through me & Alex's bedroom window, which is in the Bunny Family's apartment. I am adopted by the Bunny Family & Alex is mah brother cuz Miss Chris told me to.

We sat in mah comfy armchair on the porch, Lory in the middle so Alex couldn't helpfully Bump me, & I couldn't helpfully lose mah mind.

Lory adjusted her smart guy spectacles & began to read in her voice that makes everything sound like you should listen really good.

"Greetings, My Friend Algernon, it's time, yes much more than time 4or me to write to you. I am deep in some world's Woods & your constellation appeared to me tonight, or in my mind, I can't say yet. But I knew it was you, again, o yes, it was you, third time, & so I am writing to you from deep inside some world's Woods--"

"Hold on, Lory!" cried me. "What is he talking about?"

Lory smiled at me like I was one of her smart guy cronies. "The letter isn't done yet, Algernon. Do you want to hear some more?"

Alex reached over & patted mah nosebone very nicely with no Bumps of

any kind. I nodded at Lory. I had a very funny feeling about this letter & the person who wrote it, but I didn't tell Lory or Alex.

I nodded & Lory read more. "I think I shall be coming to visit you soon 4or sure this time. You're becoming quite the Artist--"

"Hey! Who is he talking about?" I jumped up & yelled. "Miss Chris is a Artist! I just write my newspaper & hope 4or the best!"

Lory was smiling even more at me. "This is a fan letter, Algernon. Enjoy it." Then she gived me a little kiss on mah furry cheekbone & started reading again.

"You know how big the worlds & other places are, of course, but perhaps there's more to it all than merely this. What do you think? We will talk, o surely we will talk about this & more when I visit. Stay well, My Friend. Wishing you Love & Beauty, Edgar B. Bear."

Then Lory stopped but not cuz I interrupted so I figgered she was done.

"Bump!" said Alex all brightly, be4ore I could think another thing.

"Bump?" asked Lory, & that caused a flock of Bumps that I had to flick off mah face with a flap of mah pawbone.

"Lory! This Porch is not very friendly to Bump & other fake languages!" I said.

Lory giggled. "Sorry! Alex was saying he thinks Edgar B. Bear is really smart & will probably want to know all about Bump if he doesn't already. He hopes Edgar will change your mind about Bump."

I looked hard & deeply into the sillyness of Alex's face. "He writed his letter in English, ya dum brother!"

Alex smiled & Bumped & went in a cheery 3 steps. Lory stayed with me 4or awhile.

"Lory, that Edgar B. Bear thinks I am some kind of smart guy."

"You are smart, Algernon!"

I shooked mah head. "Not like you & Sheila & Miss Chris & Princess Crissy. I am smart like mah friends the Weeds who know how to get by. I know when to write & when to run."

Lory gived me a grand hug & said, "O Algernon! There's more to you than that! Just wait & see!" Then she smiled at me & hopped through mah bedroom window back into Bags End.

I stayed put 4or a long time. I don't know how to have a fan yet. I guess I am gonna learn though.

******

Edgar B. Bear Visits Bags End!

I was sure glad that Edgar B. Bear likes mah newspaper & all, but the more I thought about him visiting Bags End, the more jittery I got.

I mean he seemed like a such a nice guy & I was worried about how some of the tricky big guys like Betsy Bunny Pillow would look at him & think: "All mine!" That's what some big guys are like, thinking us little guys as just waiting patiently around 4or our lucky chance to help their plans! Yah, right, but it's true.

Or maybe that little big guy Sargent Lisa-Marie Chow would try to make him a soldier in her silly Army of the Babys, & he would have to march up & down until she says, "Twoops Dwismwissed!" in her silly Baby accent.

One way or another, I worried. And then I worried some more. Someone likes mah newspaper & I was sure certain crazy big guys just would not stand 4or it.

So after worrying mahself into a dizzy, I decided to go see the biggest big guy of them all, even though she is smaller than me. Sheila Bunny that is. Nobody scares her a lot.

There is no really good time to go see Sheila. You just have to hope 4or bad than worse. And it helps sometimes to give her a little something 4or not throttling you with a single blow of her cute furry little paw.

But I couldn't think of anything good to bring her & her maybe wrath.

Then I came up with an idea. O Dear Readers! I trembled at this idea!

I walked into Sheila's Throne Room with a hearty but fearfilled "Hi Ho King!" & got ready to be smited in case.

Sheila was in her Throne, sleepy but awake. "How does it feel to have a fan?"

"Huh? How did you know?" I demanded.

"I read it in your newspaper, Beagle!" Sheila said almost nicely.

O rats! I thinked. I was gonna pretend Edgar was her big fan too so she would help me save him from tricks!

"So how does it feel to have a fan?" she asked again.

I flopped down in mah favorite place on the floor near her Thone.

"I don't know, Sheila! OK, I guess. But why am I worried when he visits he will end up writing Betsy's dumb lie-ography or marching in Lisa's silly Army?"

"That's Bags End, kid. Everyone here's hustling for something." I could see Sheila getting more & more nap-comfy in her Throne.

"So how do I save him?"

Sheila sleepily stared at me with one open purple eye. "You don't. He has read your newspaper. He knows what kinds of troubles pock our landscape. Just stick by him so he enjoys his stay in Bagsendland, but does not get crushed flat. Bring him around be4ore he leaves. If you both survive." Then she laughed a little laugh that could have been mean or nice, & fell asleep.

Well. Um. Well. Well, well. Sheila's favorite is never the low one. And I knowed nobody would tell me smarter advice so I figgered OK.

I kept thinking that Edgar would write to me again to say when he was coming, but his next letter didn't come day after day. Then I figgered maybe he wasn't coming after all & felt sad & relieved & sad some more.

And the thing about Bags End is tricky & strange things always happening keep it from getting bored.

I noticed something 4or the very first time while waiting & hoping & fearing Edgar's visit. That is that some guys in Bags End watch me to see what story I am writing about 4or mah newspaper. O, not Miss Chris or the Blondys 3 or mah friend Princess Crissy in Imagianna. They like mah newspaper because it is something I like to do, not because I am part of their plan.

But Betsy Bunny Pillow & Sargent Lisa watch me 4or sure. And Sheila sort of does but she is not really a big guy in ways other than her littleness. Even mah silly solipsistick brother Alexander Puppy watches me!

It was a day when all these guys tried to come hither me that Edgar showed up.

School was over 4or the day & I had just got the usual sad news that mah letter from Edgar hadn't come.

I was walking slowly toward Milne's Porch when Sargent Lisa suddenly found me & blocked mah klumping steps.

"Bweagle!" she talkd. "I have dwecided in mwy gwand mwercies not two cwourt-mwarshal you twoday."

"Thanks, fella," I gruttered & secretly got ready to run.

"Swince you are bwinging the Gwand Army of thwe Bwabys a new wecruit, your own numerous twansgressions will bwe overlooked fwor now," she talked more.

I looked at her. She is this red-haired baby with bloo eyes who wears a M*A*S*H t-shirt & green diaper, like Hawkeye on the show. She is cute except 4or her who is inside, & that is the problem.

"4orget it, Sarge!" I yelled & began to run up the ramp to the next floor cuz Lisa is not too good at toddling up.

She was madder & madder & she kept falling down so she started crawling up the ramp, but then her diaper fell off & she cried & ordered me bwehweaded, bwenosebwoned, & even debweagled. Debweagled? Hmm.

I got away 4or like a whole minute before the lights on the floor I was now on dimmed, & the shadowy figure of Betsy Bunny Pillow appeared. I froze. Lisa would be at me soon, diaper or not, so I couldn't run away.

"So you are now allied with the Abominations!" Betsy slowly whispered till she was fastly screaming. I think she meant the Face Pillows I met not long ago that I tolded about in mah It's OK to be Happy! Bags End Book.

Betsy bounced closer to me. "And now you summon a cohort to aid you in your plans to crush my Bunny Pillow Free State!"

"Betsy, I don't know him! He is just some guy who likes mah newspaper!" I whimpered.

I heard crawling noises behind me & knew it was Lisa.

"You will deliver this cohort into my possession immediately & I will determine his qualification to continue to be." I heard in Betsy's voice that sound that means she is about bounce & smother, & I was ready to do anything when someone else showed up.

"No, Ms. Pillow, do not harm Algernon!" It was a nice voice & when I looked back I saw the shiny blue bear who had made it. Edgar B. Bear?

Too late tho as Betsy screambounced through the air. I felt the bear pull me down & make me roll weirdly around & somehow Betsy missed us both!

Then Lisa was yelling, "Hwalt!" & I figgered that me and Edgar B. Bear were doomed! O unhappy day!

******

Letter to Algernon Beagle
Editor of Bags End News

Dear Algernon,

By when you read this brief epistle I will be en root to your beloved Bags End. I cannot wait to be in this strange & unique place I have read about 4or so many years now. I realize yours is not the most tame nor benevolent of lands so I shall be preparing myself 4or the most dangerous events which may occur during my visit. You are, after all, a Beagleboy journalist & there4ore must rush to the very heart of each rising hurricano! I cannot wait to get there & finaly meet you!

Love, Beauty, & Truth,
Edgar B. Bear

******

Bags End At Its Best & Worst!

I never really knowed that some guy I never met far from Bags End would read mah newspaper a lot & like it & get the bright idea in his head that he would like to visit Bags End & meet me & see Bags End 4or himself.

I had just figgered that mah newspaper was read by mah friends in Bags End & other places like Oz & Narnia, & of course by mah enemies looking 4or reasons to come around with their frowns & their big dum plans.

But then this smart guy named Edgar B. Bear writed to me & so it is true about mah newspaper being read in places unknown by strangers. Edgar's bright idea about coming to Bags End tho was turning out to be a bad one becuz the most popular word for a lot of guys in Bags End is me.

Here we were, trapped on all sides by furious big guys, caught between Betsy's smothering wrath & Sargent Lisa who was between us & the ramps away from this floor.

"Bweagle!" Lisa yelled in her dum Baby accent. "Thwere is no escwape frum your military dwuty! I am pweased to see you have fwound our newest recwute!"

Be4ore we could talk or run or anything more, tho, Betsy was closing in on us from behind. "Stand down, Sargent! I will take care of these two in my own way!" she whisperscreamed.

Lisa thinks Betsy is a big guy in her Army of the Babys & so she saluted & said, "Yes, Swir!"

Edgar started laughing. Laughing at crazed big guys is never a good idea. But he wouldn't stop!

"A real live talking Pillow just as Algernon wrote! And you are indeed Sargent Lisa-Marie Chow wearing your M✶A✶S✶H shirt!"

Betsy stopped. So did Lisa. I wanted to grab Edgar & run right then but he put his shiny blue paw on mah nosebone softly & said, "This is wonderful to really be here. To see how real all of you are!"

I kept expecting Betsy & Lisa to finish us off but they were listening to Edgar's nice ways closely.

"Are you an enemy of my Bunny Pillow Free State & why should I believe you & why should I not smother you & take you away?" asked Betsy, klumping her questions like a snowball.

"O goodness no! I read all about your heroic fight against Farmer Jones! You are very brave, Ms. Pillow!" Edgar said all blue & shiny & nice.

Betsy listened closely & puffed out her chest proudly.

"What I can't understand is why you'd try to make Algernon write a fake version of your travails. The real stories are so much more interesting. And people love so to read true stories of heroes!"

I thought Betsy was gonna bomb Edgar like Dresden with her Pillowy wrath but she didn't.

Edgar walked up to Betsy & put a paw on her dress. "Tell the truth, every word of it. Algernon has your whole heroic saga in his newspaper. Why harass or bully him when he has so loyally penned your deeds & published them to the world?"

Well, I was ready for this dream to end when it didn't.

"Beagle! You have one week to assemble from your archives every word that tells my whole heroic saga! Be prompt or be deleted!"

Humf! Betsy made the whole thing seem very Bagzinian again. I guessed I wasn't dreaming because here was a big guy pulling hard at the bit in mah mouth.

Betsy bounced off without another word & Edgar smiled nicely at me.

Ane Lisa toddled away too.

"Well," he said, all excited. "What will you show me first? Sheila's Thone Room? Miss Chris's house in Connecticut? Oooo! Princess Chrisakah's Castle in Imagianna?"

I looked at Edgar's shining face that didn't know how close we had just come to being captured & set to work on crazy big guy plans, but I decided not to tell him. He seemed smart like a big guy but sunny & hopeful in a little guy-ish way. "How about if I show you Milne's Porch first, Edgar?"

He smiled very big at me & it was a smile like Princess Crissy gives me, & like the Weeds give me without faces, the kind that believes in the better Algernon somewhere inside me. I believe too, sort of, when that smile is going.

So we walked toward Milne's Porch. Edgar is taller than me & he liked to keep one of his bloo paws on mah back nicely.

He kept finding new things to believe were really true. First was Betsy & Lisa, I guess, & then were the ramps we had to go down to get to the right level.

Then we got to the Bunny Family's apartment & he walked around believing in all sorts of things.

"I can't wait to meet Sheila!" he said. Me, I had met her already & figgered she would enjoy being met & believed in 4or a long time, so better not right now.

So we went into me & mah brother Alexander's bedroom on the way to Milne's Porch. Edgar was eager ahead of me & suddenly I heard him say a loud happy "Bump!" & another voice the usual one say "Bump!" back.

O great. Mah brother is taller than me but in his silly heartbone one of the littlest guys around. I found Edgar & Alex sitting on mah bed! talking Bump fast & slow.

Edgar was so happy tho & nice & believing that I couldn't give Alex mah usual lecture on the silly madeup language he talks.

I tried nicely instead. "Hello, brother. Would you like to come with me & our new friend Edgar onto Milne's Porch?"

Alex smiled bigbig & yelled happy Bumpwords & jumped up & tried to Bump me all happy but I runned away on mah short but determined legs till Edgar said Bump words & Alex rushed back to him to talk Bump some more.

Good Grief!

Finally, we all somehow ended up in mah comfy chair on Milne's Porch with Edgar in the middle, & me & Alex on the ends. Edgar happily talked real English to me & fake Bump to Alex like he was a good juggler.

Then it got weird. I thought again maybe I was dreaming cuz it seemed like all 3 of us were talking English & Bump together!

"Hey!" I yelled. "Something weird is happening!"

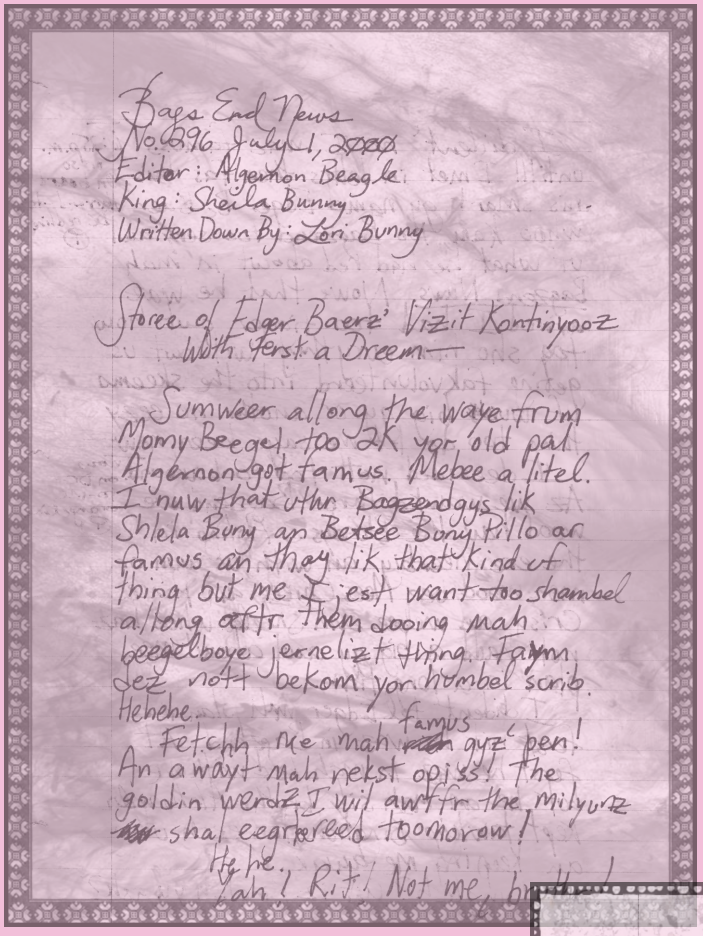
It was then that I figgered out that Edgar B. Bear was no ordinary guy. I don't know what he did, but I could understand Alex without nobody telling me what he was saying.

"Edgar! Are you a magick guy like Princess Crissy & the Blondys 3?"

Edgar smiled so happy at me & said, "Things change, Algernon, my friend. Things change."

Things change???

******



Bags End News
No. 296 July 1, 2000
Editor: Algernon Beagle
King: Sheila Bunny
Written Down By: Lori Bunny

Storee of Edgr Baerz' Vizit Kontinyooz
With ferst a Dreem—

Sumweer allong the waye frum Momy Beegel too 2K yar old pal Algernon got famus. Mebee a litel. I nuw that uthr Bagzendgys lik Shiela Buny an Betsee Buny Pillo ar famus an they lik that kind of thing but me I iest want too shambel a long aftr them looing mah beegelboye ernelizt thing. Faym dez nott bekom yor hombel scrib. Hehehe.

Fetchh me mah famus gyz' pen! An awayt mah nekst opiss! The goldin werdz I wil awtfr the milyunz shal eegarreed toomorow!

Hehehe.

Bags End News
DOUBLE ISSUE!
No. 297-298 July 8-15, 2000
Editor: Algernon Beagle
King: Sheila Bunny
Written Down By: Lori Bunny

Grand Adventurz with
Edgar Bc Baer/ Grand Finelley!

Mebee yor old pal Algernon izent famuss aftr awl. Mebee famuss iz wun thing an alott uf peepel nowing yor nam iz anuthr. I stil dont reelley no but mebee I am getting klosr too trop thinking lik thiz.

Mah frend Shiela Buny is famuss. She was born famuss. She nows howe. Mah persunmomy Mees Chrees too iz famuss lik itz aer. An mah good frend Princes Grisy. The Blondz 3 ar famuss tho I dont think it maters tog them.

An mah new frend Edgr Bc Baer iz famuss bi nowe an it dont bug him or nuthing. He iz a litel

Edgar's Visit Continues--But First a Dream

Somewhere along the way, it seems like your old pal Algernon got famous, maybe a little bit. I knew that other Bags End guys like Sheila Bunny & Betsy Bunny Pillow are famous, & they like that kind of thing, but me, I just want to shamble along after them doing mah Beagleboy journalist thing. Fame does not become your humble scribe. Hehe.

Fetch me mah famous guy's pen! And await mah next opus! The golden words I will offer the millions shall eagerly be read tomorrow!

Hehe.

Yah, right! Not me, brother!

I didn't know I was famous until I met in letters, then face, this nice smart guy named Edgar B. Bear who came to Bags End to see all of what he had read about in mah Bags End News. Now he was arrived I had to figger out how to show him everything without us getting fakevolunteered into the schemes of one big guy or another, no easy thing to do, let me say here & now--

I decided not to fool around. As we walked through Bags End, we would have the Blondys 3 floating in the air nearby, & with us one or more would be Miss Chris & Princess Crissy & maybe Sheila who has not had a big-guy-all-about-me plan in a long time.

I didn't tell Edgar mah plan the first night he was in Bags End. At first he was in mah bed with me but he & mah silly brother Alexander kept talking Binglish to each other & keeping me awake.

Binglish? What is Binglish, you ask?

Binglish is a very bad idea. Binglish drives me nearly mad sometimes.

I guess you could say Binglish is when Bump language & English 4orget they are different & I know this is a dum explanation but I have no other one.

What happened that night was that I fell asleep & had a very strange dream.

In mah dream were many Bags End guys I hardly see a lot these days.

There was this tiny little guy named Doctor Greenface, who is just a little furry fellow, but a good doctor. And there was Sargent Lisa-Marie Chow's big sister Elizabeth, who has nice bloo eyes & loves Stevie Wonder songs. And many more.

And all of them were kind of sad with me cuz I don't write about them like I do about Betsy & Lisa & Sheila & the other big guys.

"Listen! They are big guys! Big guys have big plans & big plans get writed about in newpapers!" I explained.

But these words didn't sound right to me once I said them, & so no surprise when nobody said nothing to me, just keep looking at me.

"Algernon, you are being fooled," said this boot named Jill, who usually just Squeaks & kicks.

And I got really sad, & cried, & then Alex woke me up all concerned & speaking his usual Bump tongue.

For a moment, I liked him much cuz he saved me from that dream. But then I remembered the Bump thing. I looked up at him & humfed. Then I remembered the Binglish thing & looked up at him & HUMFED big.

"Bump?" he said with his silly face.

"No. Humf!" I cried.

Alex nodded. Then he looked like he was thinking. Then he smiled & said, "Bumf!"

"O good grief! Leave me be, ya crazed relative!" I shouted.

Alex kept smiling at me like I was his biggest fan.

"O fooey!" I grumped & escaped Alex's B9-ness by crawling through the windo of mah bedroom onto Milne's Porch, & closing the window behind me.

I sat 4or a long time avoiding words, which seemed smart cuz it seems like it was mah words that had gotten me famous.

But what about mah dream? Mah friend Miss Chris's toy tall boy brother Ramie told me that dreams are real & try to send us messages, but tricky. So mah dream, what was its message?

It was, I guess, about all the unfamous guys in Bags End.

I thinked some more, real hard. Then I got it! To show Edgar Bear Bags End I had to make sure it wasn't just big guys' Bags End! He had to see the nooks & crannies too.

Then himself came crawling shyly but smiling through mah bedroom window. I smiled bigly back at him, & he sat down next to me in mah comfy armchair.

"You have been thinking too hard, my friend," he said. "I can see the strain in your face."

Well! This was new! Usually Bags End guys don't read mah face none.

"I think mah dream last night was trying to tell me I should make sure to show you more of Bags End than just about the big guys," said me.

Edgar gave me a excellent hug. "Flow, Algernon, just flow."

"But I am not a river!" quoth me. I worried I was gonna lose his thoughts again.

Edgar laughed. "No, I don't mean that at all!"

I waited for him to tell cuz I figured he would.

"Goodness, Algeron, I 4orcast that today will be our day of Grand Adventure! We will commence here & conclude here. In between will be the fun tho."

"Does that involve Pillows or Army babys?" I said suspiciously.

"Probably, but I suspect too that there will be many of the little guys your dream was full of."

"But what does flowjustflow mean!" I demanded.

Edgar was quiet. But it was a Sheila or Princess Crissy thinking quiet. "You know how once in awhile you are walking along not worrying or afraid? Just walking?"

I nodded. Even in Bags End this happened.

"Well, it's like that but more. You train yourself to be that way 4or times when you usually wouldn't be."

"But those times mah motto is run just run!" I said, & Edgar laughed merrily.

Then he got up with no more words & off we went 4or adventures in Bags End.

Now it happened to be Saturday & so none of us guys had to go to school. Me & Edgar got as far as the Bunny Family's living room be4ore adventures began.

Allie Leopard, my silly but timely brother Alex, & that nice if strange redheaded clown guy Jackie were all talking too many words too fast. I was all 4or sneaking by, but they all talked fast to Edgar & he talked fast back. Then he came back to me.

"O Algernon! We must go now!" he said. "Someone has made off with Jackie's best Squeaks!"

******

Grand Adventures with Edgar B. Bear (Grand Finally!)

Maybe your old pal Algernon isn't famous after all. Maybe famous is one thing & a lot of people knowing your name is another. I still don't really know but maybe I am getting closer to true thinking like this.

Mah friend Sheila Bunny is famous. She was born famous. She knows how. Mah friend Miss Chris too is famous like its air. And mah good friend Princess Crissy too. The Blondys 3 are famous tho I don't think it matters to them.

And mah friend Edgar B. Bear is famous by now & it don't bug him or nothing. He is a little guy at heart, & I think little guys think more about fun than famous.

OK, so then there is your old pal Algernon. I think I am famous cuz I stand next to famous guys when everyone is looking. When I told Princess Crissy this, tho, she said I was too humble. Then she hugged me a lot. And Edgar agreed & helped hug me so I was buried in hug but fine. Except for that famous part.

Princess Crissy & Edgar liked each other so fast if you blinked it was already going. And Crissy got Edgar to gang up a lot on mah humble bone. I almost had to run back from Imagianna to Bags End to Sheila & her phat dictionary to look up "humble" to remember it means modest & low to the ground, which is both what I am!

Yikes!

Now the reason we were in Imagianna is a somewhat silly one--in a way. We were there to get Princess Crissy's help in getting back Jackie Clown's best Squeaks--O goodness!

But here we had brunged the poor little guy. Jackie lives in a box & he has a pretty bloo flowery shirt & bloo cap & short red hair. I think he smiles all the time cuz clowns have to or something, but his usual squeaks were sad & some were really missing.

"Squeak-squeak-puff-squeak!" he would say sadly, & we could hear the missing Squeak.

"He says that he fears his happiest Clown days are through, & something else too, but I missed it," said Allie Leopard, who knows real & weird & fake languages too. He is a nice green-eyed guy who is friendly to all words.

We were sitting in Princess Crissy's bedroom & Jackie Clown was in the middle of us in his little wagon we pulled.

"Bump! Bump! Bump!" yelled my silly brother Alexander. I don't know how he ended up with us, but he did & all his silly Bumps in tact too.

"Alex says he has always felt a special affection 4or Squeak language. He feels it is kin to Bump. He regrets this situation & wishes he could help," said Allie but not laughing. I looked from him to Alex's silly furry yellow face smiling, & did not think Alex could make those thoughts in any language.

Crissy laughed at mah mulling face & hugged me.

"So what do we do about this?" I said after liking a good long hug.

Nobody said nothing because just then the door to Crissy's bedroom crashed open & there was Betsy Bunny Pillow fluffier & crazier than any Pillow alive or stuffed.

"BEAGLE!" she whisperscreamed but then no more after that. But it seemed like she would say more. She bounced closer toward me tho & there was no fooling around about her angry bounces.

"O Betsy! You too!" said Princess Crissy, & she was so upset & looked like Miss Chris so much that Betsy let herself be hugged & niced over.

Well, now we had a problem.

"It's like a, a, um, language eater!" I cried.

When the big guys start getting in trouble, there's no going back to calm.

Then I thinked & said, "What about Sheila? She speaks Bunny!"

And Crissy looked at me & said, "If someone is eating languages, will they get hungry 4or English too?"

Oops.

Edgar had been sitting quietly holding Alex's yellow paw to keep him OK. I remembered how excited he had been to finally come to Bags End that he had readed all about in mah newspaper. Now he was here in the middle of a huge emergency. Was he having fun? I hoped so.

"Crissy, can you make a temporary magick language 4or us to all speak in case all the rest get eaten?" Edgar asked.

Crissy smiled. Crissy smiled bigger. That's how her magick usually works.

"Usually language happens between the mouth & ears," she explained. "But since we may lose our ability to speak words to hear, we will be able to talk other ways."

Then she decided to hug me really good cuz she likes me. Even Betsy didn't complain because she likes Crissy so much too.

Then she said, "Algernon, you are the best beagle in the world!"

"O shucks, Crissy!" said me, mah humble bone all buzzing with warning.

"What did Crissy say?" asked Edgar.

"You didn't hear her?" I asked.

Edgar shook his head, & Jackie Clown semi-Squeaked, & Alex said Bump words, & Allie Leopard told us they all said no.

Crissy smiled crazytricky & said, "I talked to you with my touch! We all now can talk to each other by speaking, touching, with smell or taste or by looking hard into each other's eyes. It was the best idea I could think of."

Wow. Crissy is really smart! What a good idea! Everybody agreed & tried out the new language. I tickled Crissy hello, & Allie & Alex stared each other hard some silly Bump words. Betsy licked a lollipop she had with her--O Yuk!--& shared it with Edgar who laughed like it was a funny joke he tasted. O! Yuk!

Jackie was so happy again he pulled out a strange little green & gold flower he had hidden away in his box for each of us to smell, which we did, & sniffed his happy Squeaks. A Squeak joke of course. And he laughed a lot & has such happy red cheeks that everyone laughed a lot too.

Crissy then talked regular & said we should go to see Sheila right away.

"What is your new language called, Crissy?" asked Edgar.

Crissy smiled tricky again & said we all had to hug together & she would tell.

So we all piled on the floor around Crissy & made sure Jackie Clown was there too & when we were all hugging, Crissy said, "It's called Symbiosis."

Edgar huglaughed but I didn't know why. Crissy hugsaid, "One last thing. It's one language so no matter what your native tongue, you will understand everyone else. Neat, huh?"

"Very neat, Crissy," said a voice that sounded like mah silly Bumping brother's. Wow!

So Crissy led the troop of us back to Bags End. She walked close to Betsy & I think they touchtalked all the way tho I am not sure.

We walked to Sheila's Throne Room & I was glad to be near all these big

guys.

Edgar Bear walked next to me & patted mah headbone to talk.

"This is such a Grand Adventure!" he said, all happy.

"But it's scary! What if the Language Eater eats all of the languages & then finds out about Symbiosis!"

Hmm. "Hey! I forgot! O languages . . . yuk?" Hmm. That was weird.

Edgar laughed at me & fursaid, "O Algernon, it's all good!"

"It is?" my fur answered his paws.

"Always!" said Edgar.

"O," said me. I knowed by now that Edgar is smart like Sheila & the Blondys & Crissy & Miss Chris, so I should listen.

Edgar laughed with his mouth his time. "I get to meet Sheila Bunny now! How grand!"

Grand? Did grand mean weird or dangerous? Edgar is such a little guy loving & big guy smart!

"Should I bow?"

"No. Crissy doesn't like that stuff."

"No! To Sheila! She is the King!"

I looked up at Edgar & stopped. "No. She wishes she was King! She is only Mayor cuz we all voted 4or her & we haven't even done that in a long time!"

"O!" said Edgar & his fingers sounded unhappy. Um. Yah. Right.

"You can bow if you like, fella," I gruttered. Don't like hurting feelings bones, ya know.

So we all trooped into Sheila's Throne Room thinking we would find her there curled up in her Throne with a carrot. O! Yuk! & maybe a Kerouac book or a jazz record on. But no. The room was empty.

"Where could Sheila be?" asked Princess Crissy out loud, & it sounded weird cuz we had all been talking the other ways while walking.

"Sheila might be with Miss Chris in Connecticut," said me. "Or riding her BunnyCycle somewhere."

Crissy had a perplexed look. "I hope she isn't in trouble."

Goodness! This story was getting worse & worse! "We should go see Miss Chris right away!" said me. Crissy & everyone agreed & Edgar was all happy even tho he just hadn't met Sheila! Well, I really hoped he would meet Miss Chris & that things would get better.

Crissy smiled at me & I figgered another hug was coming & it was. But this was a bigger hug cuz it had hugwords in it & I hugged back "O shucks!" a lot & "I love you, Crissy" words too.

"OK, Algernon, we should go now," she talked out loud. Betsy came up & dirty looked me till she was next to Crissy. Ha! Crissy wants to be a beagle, not a dum Pillow I thoughted while looking at her.

"I heard that, you dum PUF!" Betsy whisperscreamed, um, puffed. I had 4orgotted we all talked Symbiosis but I didn't know mah eyes had talked to her.

I decided to chill with the little guys in the group. I found them playing a game sitting in a circle.

"Squeak! Squeak! Puff! Squeak!" cried Jackie Clown, his sadness forgotten.

"Bump Puff Bump!" said Alex.

Edgar B. Bear clapped his pretty bloo paws twice, then missed once, then clapped again.

Allie Leopard said, "Jackie & Alex & Edgar get one point each!" & all the little guys laughed & cheered.

"Listen, it's time to see Miss Chris," said me, sort of politely. I was

surprised they all got right up to follow me. Well, Crissy really cuz she was head big guy of our group.

So we went to the door that leads to Miss Chris's bedroom in Connecticut. We found Miss Chris on her bed with her bunny slippers & she was sucking her thum & reading mah newspaper! Wow!

She picked up on Symbiosis language really easy & pretty soon all of us were crowded together on her bed hugging close & talking eyes, ears, paws, & so on too. Even dangerous big guy Betsy was good. How could she be a bully with Crissy & Miss Chris & Edgar & everyone else friendly languaging her?

Then Miss Chris putted me in her lap 4or special niceness. "A-wa-wa, you are the best writer I know!" she smiledsaid.

"O shucks!" I humbled. "Thank you!"

Crissy sat next to Miss Chris & they looked smiling at mah newspaper.

"See how the words are appearing as I talk?" said Miss Chris. "I knew you were coming because I read about it while you were on your way!"

Crissy looked double proud at me. "Algernon! How did you do it?" she asked.

Then I figgered what they were saying by looking at the newspaper & watching the words 4orm on the page, & I saw how what was happening was showing up as words on the page.

"Hey!" I yell.

"Bump!" yelled Alex, thinking we were playing a game.

"Squeak!" yelled Jackie Clown, who loves games.

Crissy is looking at me now with her smart pretty face. "Algernon, I think you are writing all of this using the Symbiosis language I made up."

"Huh?" I say.

"Your thoughts are going right to the page without you having to write them down."

"Oh" I say. "Yes. Sure."

"What?" I yell. "That's crazy!" I add. I look at the paper Crissy & Miss Chris are holding, & see these words going down one after the next as I think them. Frog! I think, & it goes down too.

It was even worse with Miss Chris & Princess Crissy looking all proud of me. Mah humble bone stayed quiet, keeping out of the way. Smart bone, I'd say.

"So now what?" I grumbled. "Do I think everything good again? Would that work?"

Suddenly, Betsy Bunny Pillow leaned close to me & without words of any kind I got her message that she wanted her whisper voice back right away. So I gived it to her.

She harumfed at me & left right away, stopping only long enough to get more hugs from Miss Chris & Crissy, & say to me, "Don't 4orget about the work I've honored you with!"

Yah right. Honor. Does she think I am Tweedledummer or Tweedledummest?

I then heard Bumps & Squeaks & real English words & laughing & Pufs & saw the little guys were playing their game again. It was like they kept 4orgetting to be upset & scared cuz they had each other to play with, & they knew that big guys Crissy & Miss Chris would take care of them & tell them what to do next.

So I gave back full languages to all the guys who lost them. The funny thing was the little guys went on with their game after stopping just long enough to decide they liked the Puff part even tho it was bad be4ore!

Then Crissy & Miss Chris decided to play the Hug Algernon Game, which

is mostly about hugging me & laughing a lot.

I was hugged & happy, which was usually good, but I wasn't as happy as I should be.

"What's wrong, A-wa-wa?" asked Miss Chris as Crissy & her team-skritched me. Yum! Oops--

"I dunno. Seems like something tricky goes on here. I mean things looked so bleak & then it was all good again. Usually it's harder."

Crissy looked at me think-big. "Does it have to be so hard?"

"I don't know, dude. Just seems like funny business."

I had about a half minute more full attention from Miss Chris & Crissy be4ore life righted itself.

"Good job saving us all, beagle. Now move over!" said suddenly Sheila, all little-big & purpled-eyed. She accepted all the kisses & hugs & happiness for her like this is how it should be. I didn't fight her tho cuz mah brain was burning too hard to settle & enjoy such affections.

Then I saw mah newspaper that Miss Chris has been reading. I saw that it wasn't writing on its own no more.

"No more Symbiosis?" I asked Crissy. She smiled. O. Right.

I said goodbye to everyone & went back to Bags End. Just be4ore I left, Sheila said from her Throne of Girls, "Sometimes problems contain their own solutions, beagle." And Edgar B. Bear, who was also being holded pretty good, said, "Thank you so much, Algernon! I am so glad I came!"

I wandered the hallways & levels of Bags End 4or a long time. Sheila was right. And Edgar was happy. And everyone had their languages back. It's all good, I guess.

Finally I was tired enough to want to sit, so I ended up on Milne's Porch in mah comfy chair.

Hm. I sat there mulling 4or a long time till the Blondys 3 came. Blondys don't say too much but they know more than most. They floated in a trey of smiles from beyond Milne's Porch & they didn't talk a single word. Even Simmi the Baby Blondy, who is a real good cheerleader, only cheered me with her eyes.

They floated all around me but I wasn't scared. Maybe they used wordless Blondy magick to help. I don't know but I fell asleep & later, when I woke up, I was OK again. Edgar B. Bear was asleep in mah chair with me, & he was dreamsmilinghappy.

It's all good.

I 4orget I guess.

I'll try harder to remember 4or the next time. O there will be a next time!

* * * * * *

Joe Ciccone

Checked Out

Let me guess you work in a room
without chairs

your attachments only
to air and emoji

beyond yourself you are aware of
nothing just your

own rituals like a child
often on a bike

and in the way you travel everywhere
but see nothing

read but do not retain
know of artists but nothing

of art your memory full
of meaningless pictures

poses from a life
that is not yours

perhaps this is why
you will never understand

in this brief moment
among our shared voyages

the many ways in which it is wrong
to stand there like an idiot

eating a banana in this lovely just
lovely hotel lobby

* * * * * *

Allen Ginsberg

Howl

For Carl Solomon

Collected Poems, 1947-1980

I

I saw the best minds of my generation destroyed by madness, starving hysterical naked,
dragging themselves through the negro streets at dawn looking for an angry fix,
angelheaded hipsters burning for the ancient heavenly connection to the starry dynamo in the machinery of night,
who poverty and tatters and hollow-eyed and high sat up smoking in the supernatural darkness of cold-water flats floating across the tops of cities contemplating jazz,
who bared their brains to Heaven under the El and saw Mohammedan angels staggering on tenement roofs illuminated,
who passed through universities with radiant cool eyes hallucinating Arkansas and Blake-light tragedy among the scholars of war,
who were expelled from the academies for crazy & publishing obscene odes on the windows of the skull,
who cowered in unshaven rooms in underwear, burning their money in wastebaskets and listening to the Terror through the wall,
who got busted in their pubic beards returning through Laredo with a belt of marijuana for New York,
who ate fire in paint hotels or drank turpentine in Paradise Alley, death, or purgatoried their torsos night after night
with dreams, with drugs, with waking nightmares, alcohol and cock and endless balls,
incomparable blind streets of shuddering cloud and lightning in the mind leaping toward poles of Canada & Paterson, illuminating all the motionless world of Time between,
Peyote solidities of halls, backyard green tree cemetery dawns, wine drunkenness over the rooftops, storefront boroughs of teahead joyride neon blinking traffic light, sun and moon and tree vibrations in the roaring winter dusks of Brooklyn, ashcan rantings and kind king light of mind,
who chained themselves to subways for the endless ride from Battery to holy Bronx on benzedrine until the noise of wheels and children brought them down shuddering mouth-wracked and battered bleak of brain all drained of brilliance in the drear light of Zoo,
who sank all night in submarine light of Bickford's floated out and sat through the stale beer afternoon in desolate Fugazzi's, listening to the crack of doom on the hydrogen jukebox,
who talked continuously seventy hours from park to pad to bar to Bellevue to museum to the Brooklyn Bridge,
a lost battalion of platonic conversationalists jumping down the stoops off fire escapes off windowsills off Empire State out of the moon,

yacketayakking screaming vomiting whispering facts and memories and anecdotes and eyeball kicks and shocks of hospitals and jails and wars,
whole intellects disgorged in total recall for seven days and nights with brilliant eyes, meat for the Synagogue cast on the pavement,
who vanished into nowhere Zen New Jersey leaving a trail of ambiguous picture postcards of Atlantic City Hall,
suffering Eastern sweats and Tangerian bone-grindings and migraines of China under junk-withdrawal in Newark's bleak furnished room,
who wandered around and around at midnight in the railroad yard wondering where to go, and went, leaving no broken hearts,
who lit cigarettes in boxcars boxcars boxcars racketing through snow toward lonesome farms in grandfather night,
who studied Plotinus Poe St. John of the Cross telepathy and bop kabbalah because the cosmos instinctively vibrated at their feet in Kansas,
who loned it through the streets of Idaho seeking visionary indian angels who were visionary indian angels,
who thought they were only mad when Baltimore gleamed in supernatural ecstasy,
who jumped in limousines with the Chinaman of Oklahoma on the impulse of winter midnight streetlight smalltown rain,
who lounged hungry and lonesome through Houston seeking jazz or sex or soup, and followed the brilliant Spaniard to converse about America and Eternity, a hopeless task, and so took ship to Africa,
who disappeared into the volcanoes of Mexico leaving behind nothing but the shadow of dungarees and the lava and ash of poetry scattered in fireplace Chicago,
who reappeared on the West Coast investigating the FBI in beards and shorts with big pacifist eyes sexy in their dark skin passing out incomprehensible leaflets,
who burned cigarette holes in their arms protesting the narcotic tobacco haze of Capitalism,
who distributed Supercommunist pamphlets in Union Square weeping and undressing while the sirens of Los Alamos wailed them down, and wailed down Wall, and the Staten Island ferry also wailed,
who broke down crying in white gymnasiums naked and trembling before the machinery of other skeletons,
who bit detectives in the neck and shrieked with delight in policecars for committing no crime but their own wild cooking pederasty and intoxication,
who howled on their knees in the subway and were dragged off the roof waving genitals and manuscripts,
who let themselves be fucked in the ass by saintly motorcyclists, and screamed with joy,
who blew and were blown by those human seraphim, the sailors, caresses of Atlantic and Caribbean love,
who balled in the morning in the evenings in rosegardens and the grass of public parks and cemeteries scattering their semen freely to whomever come who may,
who hiccuped endlessly trying to giggle but wound up with a sob behind a partition in a Turkish Bath when the blond & naked angel came to pierce them with a sword,
who lost their loveboys to the three old shrews of fate the one eyed shrew of the heterosexual dollar the one eyed shrew that winks out of the womb and the one eyed shrew that does nothing but sit on her ass and snip the intellectual golden threads of the craftsman's loom,

who copulated ecstatic and insatiate with a bottle of beer a sweetheart a package of cigarettes a candle and fell off the bed, and continued along the floor and down the hall and ended fainting on the wall with a vision of ultimate cunt and come eluding the last gyzym of consciousness,

who sweetened the snatches of a million girls trembling in the sunset, and were red eyed in the morning but prepared to sweeten the snatch of the sunrise, flashing buttocks under barns and naked in the lake,

who went out whoring through Colorado in myriad stolen night-cars, N.C., secret hero of these poems, cocksman and Adonis of Denver—joy to the memory of his innumerable lays of girls in empty lots & diner backyards, moviehouses' rickety rows, on mountaintops in caves or with gaunt waitresses in familiar roadside lonely petticoat upliftings & especially secret gas-station solipsisms of johns, & hometown alleys too,

who faded out in vast sordid movies, were shifted in dreams, woke on a sudden Manhattan, and picked themselves up out of basements hung-over with heartless Tokay and horrors of Third Avenue iron dreams & stumbled to unemployment offices,

who walked all night with their shoes full of blood on the snowbank docks waiting for a door in the East River to open to a room full of steam-heat and opium,

who created great suicidal dramas on the apartment cliff-banks of the Hudson under the wartime blue floodlight of the moon & their heads shall be crowned with laurel in oblivion,

who ate the lamb stew of the imagination or digested the crab at the muddy bottom of the rivers of Bowery,

who wept at the romance of the streets with their pushcarts full of onions and bad music,

who sat in boxes breathing in the darkness under the bridge, and rose up to build harpsichords in their lofts,

who coughed on the sixth floor of Harlem crowned with flame under the tubercular sky surrounded by orange crates of theology,

who scribbled all night rocking and rolling over lofty incantations which in the yellow morning were stanzas of gibberish,

who cooked rotten animals lung heart feet tail borsht & tortillas dreaming of the pure vegetable kingdom,

who plunged themselves under meat trucks looking for an egg,

who threw their watches off the roof to cast their ballot for Eternity outside of Time, & alarm clocks fell on their heads every day for the next decade,

who cut their wrists three times successively unsuccessfully, gave up and were forced to open antique stores where they thought they were growing old and cried,

who were burned alive in their innocent flannel suits on Madison Avenue amid blasts of leaden verse & the tanked-up clatter of the iron regiments of fashion & the nitroglycerine shrieks of the fairies of advertising & the mustard gas of sinister intelligent editors, or were run down by the drunken taxicabs of Absolute Reality,

who jumped off the Brooklyn Bridge this actually happened and walked away unknown and forgotten into the ghostly daze of Chinatown soup alleyways & firetrucks, not even one free beer,

who sang out of their windows in despair, fell out of the subway window, jumped in the filthy Passaic, leaped on negroes, cried all over the street, danced on broken wineglasses barefoot smashed phonograph records of nostalgic European 1930s German jazz finished the whiskey and threw up groaning into the bloody toilet, moans in their ears and the blast of colossal steamwhistles,

who barreled down the highways of the past journeying to each other's hotrod-Golgotha jail-solitude watch or Birmingham jazz incarnation,

who drove crosscountry seventytwo hours to find out if I had a vision or you had a vision or he had a vision to find out Eternity,

who journeyed to Denver, who died in Denver, who came back to Denver & waited in vain, who watched over Denver & brooded & loned in Denver and finally went away to find out the Time, & now Denver is lonesome for her heroes,

who fell on their knees in hopeless cathedrals praying for each other's salvation and light and breasts, until the soul illuminated its hair for a second,

who crashed through their minds in jail waiting for impossible criminals with golden heads and the charm of reality in their hearts who sang sweet blues to Alcatraz,

who retired to Mexico to cultivate a habit, or Rocky Mount to tender Buddha or Tangiers to boys or Southern Pacific to the black locomotive or Harvard to Narcissus to Woodlawn to the daisychain or grave,

who demanded sanity trials accusing the radio of hypnotism & were left with their insanity & their hands & a hung jury,

who threw potato salad at CCNY lecturers on Dadaism and subsequently presented themselves on the granite steps of the madhouse with shaven heads and harlequin speech of suicide, demanding instantaneous lobotomy,

and who were given instead the concrete void of insulin Metrazol electricity hydrotherapy psychotherapy occupational therapy pingpong & amnesia,

who in humorless protest overturned only one symbolic pingpong table, resting briefly in catatonia,

returning years later truly bald except for a wig of blood, and tears and fingers, to the visible madman doom of the wards of the madtowns of the East,

Pilgrim State's Rockland's and Greystone's foetid halls, bickering with the echoes of the soul, rocking and rolling in the midnight solitude-bench dolmen-realms of love, dream of life a nightmare, bodies turned to stone as heavy as the moon,

with mother finally ******, and the last fantastic book flung out of the tenement window, and the last door closed at 4 A.M. and the last telephone slammed at the wall in reply and the last furnished room emptied down to the last piece of mental furniture, a yellow paper rose twisted on a wire hanger in the closet, and even that imaginary, nothing but a hopeful little bit of hallucination—

ah, Carl, while you are not safe I am not safe, and now you're really in the total animal soup of time—

and who therefore ran through the icy streets obsessed with a sudden flash of the alchemy of the use of the ellipsis catalogue a variable measure and the vibrating plane,

who dreamt and made incarnate gaps in Time & Space through images juxtaposed, and trapped the archangel of the soul between 2 visual images and joined the elemental verbs and set the noun and dash of consciousness together jumping with sensation of Pater Omnipotens Aeterna Deus

to recreate the syntax and measure of poor human prose and stand before you speechless and intelligent and shaking with shame, rejected yet confessing out the soul to conform to the rhythm of thought in his naked and endless head,

the madman bum and angel beat in Time, unknown, yet putting down here what might be left to say in time come after death,

and rose reincarnate in the ghostly clothes of jazz in the goldhorn shadow of the band and blew the suffering of America's naked mind for love into an eli eli lamma lamma sabacthani saxophone cry that shivered the cities down to the last radio

with the absolute heart of the poem of life butchered out of their own bodies good to eat a thousand years.

II

What sphinx of cement and aluminum bashed open their skulls and ate up their brains and imagination?

Moloch! Solitude! Filth! Ugliness! Ashcans and unobtainable dollars! Children screaming under the stairways! Boys sobbing in armies! Old men weeping in the parks!

Moloch! Moloch! Nightmare of Moloch! Moloch the loveless! Mental Moloch! Moloch the heavy judger of men!

Moloch the incomprehensible prison! Moloch the crossbone soulless jailhouse and Congress of sorrows! Moloch whose buildings are judgment! Moloch the vast stone of war! Moloch the stunned governments!

Moloch whose mind is pure machinery! Moloch whose blood is running money! Moloch whose fingers are ten armies! Moloch whose breast is a cannibal dynamo! Moloch whose ear is a smoking tomb!

Moloch whose eyes are a thousand blind windows! Moloch whose skyscrapers stand in the long streets like endless Jehovahs! Moloch whose factories dream and croak in the fog! Moloch whose smoke-stacks and antennae crown the cities!

Moloch whose love is endless oil and stone! Moloch whose soul is electricity and banks! Moloch whose poverty is the specter of genius! Moloch whose fate is a cloud of sexless hydrogen! Moloch whose name is the Mind!

Moloch in whom I sit lonely! Moloch in whom I dream Angels! Crazy in Moloch! Cocksucker in Moloch! Lacklove and manless in Moloch!

Moloch who entered my soul early! Moloch in whom I am a consciousness without a body! Moloch who frightened me out of my natural ecstasy! Moloch whom I abandon! Wake up in Moloch! Light streaming out of the sky!

Moloch! Moloch! Robot apartments! invisible suburbs! skeleton treasuries! blind capitals! demonic industries! spectral nations! invincible madhouses! granite cocks! monstrous bombs!

They broke their backs lifting Moloch to Heaven! Pavements, trees, radios, tons! lifting the city to Heaven which exists and is everywhere about us!

Visions! omens! hallucinations! miracles! ecstasies! gone down the American river!

Dreams! adorations! illuminations! religions! the whole boatload of sensitive bullshit!

Breakthroughs! over the river! flips and crucifixions! gone down the flood! Highs! Epiphanies! Despairs! Ten years' animal screams and suicides! Minds! New loves! Mad generation! down on the rocks of Time!

Real holy laughter in the river! They saw it all! the wild eyes! the holy yells! They bade farewell! They jumped off the roof! to solitude! waving! carrying flowers! Down to the river! into the street!

III

Carl Solomon! I'm with you in Rockland
  where you're madder than I am
I'm with you in Rockland
  where you must feel very strange
I'm with you in Rockland
  where you imitate the shade of my mother
I'm with you in Rockland
  where you've murdered your twelve secretaries
I'm with you in Rockland
  where you laugh at this invisible humor
I'm with you in Rockland
  where we are great writers on the same dreadful typewriter
I'm with you in Rockland
  where your condition has become serious and is reported on the radio
I'm with you in Rockland
  where the faculties of the skull no longer admit the worms of the senses
I'm with you in Rockland
  where you drink the tea of the breasts of the spinsters of Utica
I'm with you in Rockland
  where you pun on the bodies of your nurses the harpies of the Bronx
I'm with you in Rockland
  where you scream in a straightjacket that you're losing the game of the actual pingpong of the abyss
I'm with you in Rockland
  where you bang on the catatonic piano the soul is innocent and immortal it should never die ungodly in an armed madhouse
I'm with you in Rockland
  where fifty more shocks will never return your soul to its body again from its pilgrimage to a cross in the void
I'm with you in Rockland
  where you accuse your doctors of insanity and plot the Hebrew socialist revolution against the fascist national Golgotha
I'm with you in Rockland
  where you will split the heavens of Long Island and resurrect your living human Jesus from the superhuman tomb
I'm with you in Rockland
  where there are twentyfive thousand mad comrades all together singing the final stanzas of the Internationale
I'm with you in Rockland
  where we hug and kiss the United States under our bedsheets the United States that coughs all night and won't let us sleep

I'm with you in Rockland
where we wake up electrified out of the coma by our own souls' airplanes roaring over the roof they've come to drop angelic bombs the hospital illuminates itself imaginary walls collapse O skinny legions run outside O starry-spangled shock of mercy the eternal war is here O victory forget your underwear we're free
I'm with you in Rockland
in my dreams you walk dripping from a sea-journey on the highway across America in tears to the door of my cottage in the Western night

San Francisco 1955-56

* * *

Footnote to Howl

Holy! Holy! Holy! Holy! Holy! Holy! Holy! Holy! Holy! Holy! Holy! Holy! Holy! Holy! Holy!
The world is holy! The soul is holy! The skin is holy! The nose is holy! The tongue and cock and hand and asshole holy!
Everything is holy! everybody's holy! everywhere is holy! everyday is in eternity! Everyman's an angel!
The bum's as holy as the seraphim! the madman is holy as you my soul are holy!
The typewriter is holy the poem is holy the voice is holy the hearers are holy the ecstasy is holy!
Holy Peter holy Allen holy Solomon holy Lucien holy Kerouac holy Huncke holy Burroughs holy Cassady holy the unknown buggered and suffering beggars holy the hideous human angels!
Holy my mother in the insane asylum! Holy the cocks of the grandfathers of Kansas!
Holy the groaning saxophone! Holy the bop apocalypse! Holy the jazzbands marijuana hipsters peace peyote pipes & drums!
Holy the solitudes of skyscrapers and pavements! Holy the cafeterias filled with the millions! Holy the mysterious rivers of tears under the streets!
Holy the lone juggernaut! Holy the vast lamb of the middleclass! Holy the crazy shepherds of rebellion! Who digs Los Angeles IS Los Angeles!
Holy New York Holy San Francisco Holy Peoria & Seattle Holy Paris Holy Tangiers Holy Moscow Holy Istanbul!
Holy time in eternity holy eternity in time holy the clocks in space holy the fourth dimension holy the fifth International holy the Angel in Moloch!
Holy the sea holy the desert holy the railroad holy the locomotive holy the visions holy the hallucinations holy the miracles holy the eyeball holy the abyss!
Holy forgiveness! mercy! charity! faith! Holy! Ours! bodies! suffering! magnanimity!
Holy the supernatural extra brilliant intelligent kindness of the soul!

Berkeley 1955

* * * * * *

David Hartley

Hartley's Righteous Rants

I'll tell you where the four winds sleep
Like four lean hounds the lighthouse keep
Wildflower seed in the sand and wind
May the four winds blow you home again
—Grateful Dead, "Franklin's Tower," 1975.

Editor's Note: This installment of Hartley's Righteous Rants features an interview I conducted with him recently. I've known Hartley for many years, & call him a dear friend, a gifted musician, & a provocative visionary. He calls himself, foremost, a "scientist" &, additionally, a "good man trapped in a sea of evil."

R.S. – You and I used to talk about your time traveling from Grateful Dead show to show in the 1970s. What was that like?

D.H. - For me it was a mild form of freedom, weirdness, and adventure. I liked the idea of socially marginal freaks involved in free enterprise and the communal vibe. The cops were usually a drag, and I saw some severe unprovoked violence by them. I also saw police being kind and helpful on other occasions.

I can see why Deadheads pissed them off, though. It wasn't anything we did. It was the way we did it. We just confused them, or represented some scary insurgency, but we were all normal American youth out for a good time.

I remember they banned the Dead from venues and stadiums, because of the crowds, but Deadheads didn't do anything anti-social—unlike the sports fans who caused damage and fights and broken bottles everywhere.

R.S. – Did you have teachers or gurus who helped shape your thinking or guide your path back then?
D.H. - I never had a guru, not even a mentor or an older person that was a role model. Books and music were about all.

R.S. – Did you have any enemies?
D.H. - I only had one enemy: the government minions, troopers, bureaucrats, and politicians. It was not out of ideological distain, or some love of anarchy. It was simply because of the criminal immoral unforgivable evil acts they did. My disgust has only intensified. Truth be told, I think a man is shaped more by his enemies than his allies. Unfortunate reality. Mobs of Stupid Evil People with Power are what I'm talking about.

R.S. – What were your life like when you growing up?
D.H. - My town was Ocean Grove, New Jersey, "God's Square Mile," founded in 1869 as an outgrowth of the Christian "camp meeting" movement. No cars on Sundays, etc. It's near to Asbury Park.

I was just a nerdy hippie kid. A good kid who never did crime or committed any anti-social acts. Never joined the Boy Scouts either. I had one friend Harry, who was also only child, and lived a block away. The other kids were dull.

I should mention that my parents were atheists and we lived in a fundamentalist Christian community. This put me in a weird position from the get-go. It's funny but I never resented the church or Christians, even though it was a little bizarre they never attacked me. It was the sixties and it was a safe community. I mostly just listened to AM transistor radio I tied to my bike, and bought 45s, and read books and magazines.

The July 1970 riots in Asbury Park changed everything. I bought the 45 "American Pie" by Don McLean at that time. The song was so long that I had to flip it over halfway through. I remember that song was really the first time a song was talking to me about me, and spoke directly to what was happening outside my door:

And as the flames climbed high into the night
To light the sacrificial rite
I saw Satan laughing with delight
The day the music died

I could see the flames and hear the violence of the riots from my tiny bedroom's window, as I played that song on my record player. I do recall this deep sense of foreboding. That song sums up my boyhood pretty well. The little record store where I bought that 45 got burned out in the riots.

1970 was quite a transition from the year before when we got a little TV to watch the moon landing, and I heard about Woodstock. In 1970, the culture went down the shitter overnight. The seventies were turmoil and decadence. That's when I really started to split off from the timeline of the contemporary culture. Teenage years and hard knocks.

R.S. – How did you split off?
D.H. – I suppose the *splitting off* was in a sense the cultural chasm that opened between the counter culture and the straight culture. I basically lived, & still live, in the chasm amongst the discarded potentials from both sides.

The debris in the chasm took on different forms, like a pile of moldy fruit. It morphed into a mythical weird parallel dream world. I live in a weird old America that really never existed. It can be found in old records and Grateful Dead songs and Herman Melville writings. The trippy part of it all is how that cultural spillway flowed past the modern world and put me into the future of mainstream reality.

Melville's great novel *Moby Dick* and the Grateful Dead odyssey are similar. Melville and Jerry Garcia's aesthetics are also similar. Robert Hunter's lyrics are deliberately weird old mythic America. Songs like "Row Jimmy" and "Brown Eyed Women." Especially "Franklin's Tower." But dozens more. Like *Moby Dick*, there is mythical but immediate relevance to it.

I still open *Moby Dick* to random pages, and read little excerpts, even the discourses on the history of a whale disgorging tool is gold to me. Whale disgorging tools are down here in the chasm with tube amps and 78 RPM records of yodeling train engineers.

R.S. – The future of mainstream reality?
D.H. – The chasm widens and the Matrix buckles and breaks. It's been happening on larger and larger scale with more and more people, I call it the Great Unraveling And due to my particular past circumstances and present one, I never had a well-raveled Matrix to begin with.

The Matrix has always been an artifice to me and its unraveling is actually the mainstream reality righting itself. 50% of Millennials are uncertain if the earth is round. The news reports this a bad thing, but I think that uncertainty about something most people can't measure or experience is progress.

I guess nothing has really changed in my mind. The dominant culture is basically a fascist-controlled, group-think, propaganda-driven shit hole, but I still strive for liberty, freedom, equality, justice, and self-expression, and believe we can do better if we can repel tyranny.

* * * * * *

Judih Haggai

stories to tell
songs to sing
then a look inside

* * *

mind wrestle
dreams vs. wakefulness
outcome unsure

* * *

sadness in retreat
back to simple joy
date and nut morning

* * *

lush scent of freedom
blossoms moment to moment
as birds peck loquats

* * *

tank fire - good morning
peacocks - good morning
silence - my cue

* * *

buzzing entities
beloveds on location
heart-bliss morning

* * *

each step
a moment more
enjoyment

* * *

before the brushstrokes
melodic songbird
day's invitation

* * *

dear self
let the winds of anger
teflon by

* * *

small blue planet
sundance solstice
bow to your partner

* * *

so wise
so many years ago
now humility

* * *

in the distance
one more phenomenon
beyond my control

* * * * * *

Anaïs Nin

"Now I know why fairy tales are full of jewels": 1955 LSD Trip Diary

from The Diary of Anaïs Nin, *Vol. 5: 1947-1955*

I had just read Aldous Huxley's *The Doors of Perception*, but it did not impress me as much as Gil Henderson's talk about the visionary effects of LSD. He had participated in an experiment by Dr. Oscar Janiger. He painted an American Indian doll before taking LSD and then again after the ingestion of the drug, and the difference between them was astonishing. The first version was rigid and photographic. The second impressionistic, emotional. Gil asked me if I wanted to participate in an experiment because Dr. Janiger was hoping a writer would be more articulate about the experience. There were to be two other subjects there, a biologist from UCLA and another painter. Gil would be my sober pilot, that is, a person who has taken LSD and now stands by to help one and guide one if necessary.

It seemed strange to be coming to a psychiatrist's office for such an adventure. Dr. Janiger took Gil and me into his private office, which was lined with books and very dark. I had little time to form an impression of him, for he immediately dispensed a number of blue pills, five or eight, I do not remember, with a glass of water. The he conducted us to the waiting room, where the biologist sat already with a pad on his knee, pen in hand.

At first nothing appeared unchanged. But after a while, perhaps twenty minutes, I noticed first of all that the rug was no longer flat and lifeless, but had become a field of stirring and undulating hairs, much like the movement of the sea anemone or a field of wheat in the wind. Then I noticed that doors, walls, and windows were liquefying. All rigidities disappeared. It was as if I had been plunged to the bottom of the sea, and everything had become undulating and wavering. The doorknobs were no longer doorknobs; they melted and undulated like living serpents. Every object in the room became a living, mobile breathing world. I walked away, into a hallway opening into several small rooms. On the way there was a door leading to the garden. Gil opened it. The dazzle of the sun was blinding, every speck of gold multiplied and magnified. Trees, clouds, lawns heaved and undulated too, the clouds flying at tremendous speed. I ceased looking at the garden because on the plain door now appeared the most delicate Persian designs, flowers, mandalas, patterns in perfect symmetry. As I designed them they produced their matching music. When I drew a long orange line, it emitted its own orange tone. My body was both swimming and flying. I felt gay and at ease and playful.

There was perfect connection between my body and everything that was happening. For example, the colors in the designs gave me pleasure, as well as the music. The singing of mockingbirds was multiplied, and became a whole forest of singing birds. My senses were multiplied as if I had a hundred eyes, a hundred ears, a hundred fingertips. The murals which appeared were perfect, they were Oriental, fragile, and complete, but then they became actual Oriental cities, with pagodas, temples, rich Chinese gold and red altars, and Balinese music. The music vibrated through my body as I were one of the instruments and I felt myself becoming a full percussion orchestra, becoming green, blue, orange. The waves of the sounds ran through my hair like a caress. The music ran down my back and came out of my fingertips. I was a cascade of red-blue rainfall, a rainbow. I was small, light, mobile. I could use any method of levitation I wished. I could dissolve, melt, float, soar. Wavelets of light touched the rim

of my clothes, phosphorescent radiations.

I could see a new world with my middle eye, a world I had missed before. I caught images behind images, the walls behind the sky, the sky behind the infinite. The walls became fountains, the fountains became arches, the domes skies, the sky a flowering carpet, and all dissolved into pure space. I looked at a slender line curving out into space which disappeared into infinity. I saw a million zeros on this line, curving, shrinking in the distance, and I laughed and said: "Excuse me, I am not a mathematician. How can I measure the infinite?" To Dr. Janiger, who was passing by, I said: "Without being a mathematician I understood the infinite." He did not seem impressed. I saw his face as a Picasso, with a slight asymmetry. It seemed to me that one of his eyes was larger, and this eye was prying into my experience, and I turned away. Gil was sometimes there, but now I became aware that he was a child, that he had a big round face with a grin.

Now I was standing on the rim of a planet, alone. I could hear the fast rushing sound of the planets rotating in space. Then I was moving among them and I realized a certain skill would be necessary to handle this new means of transportation. The image of myself standing in space and trying to get my "space legs" amused me. I wondered who had been there before me and whether I would return to earth. The solitude distressed me and for the first time, the sense of distance, so I asked Gil very vehemently: "Are you sure that I will find my way back?" Gil answered reasonably: "Of course, I found my way back. I'm here." He asked if there was anything I wanted, a glass of water or a sandwich. I answered: "I want a pagoda." And after a while I added: "I realize this is an unreasonable request."

I returned to my starting point. I was standing in front of an ugly door, but as I looked closer it was not plain or green but it was a Buddhist temple, a Hindu column, a Moroccan ceiling, gold spires being formed and re-formed as if I were watching the hand of a designer at work. I was designing red spirals which unfurled until they formed a rose window or a mandala with edges of radium. As each design was born and arranged itself, it dissolved and the next one followed with confusion. Each form, each line emitted its equivalent in music in perfect accord with the design. An undulating line emitted music in perfect accord with the design. An undulating line emitted a sustaining undulating melody, a circle had corresponding musical notations, diaphanous colors, diaphanous sounds, a pyramid of ascending notes, and vanishing ones left only an echo. The designs were preparatory sketches for entire Oriental cities. I saw the temples of Java, Kashmir, Nepal, Ceylon, Burma, Cambodia, in all the colors of precious stones illumined from within. Then the outer forms of the temples dissolved to reveal the inner chapels and shrines. The reds and golds inside the temples created an intricate musical orchestration like Balinese music. Two sensations began to torment me: one that it was happening too quickly and that I would not be able to remember it, another that I would not be able to tell what I saw, it was too elusive and too overwhelming. The temples grew taller, the music wilder, it became a tidal wave of sounds with gongs and bells predominating. Gold spires emitted a long flute chant. Every line and color was constantly breathing and mutating.

It was then I began to experience difficulties in breathing. I felt immensely cold, and very small in my cape, as if I had undergone an Alice in Wonderland metamorphosis. I told Gil I could not breathe, and he took me to the doctor. The doctor calmed me with his words. I had asked for oxygen. He suggested I lie down and cover myself well. Gil was seated near me, grinning. I asked him if he had had difficulties breathing. I still had the impression that I had been among the planets. I remembered the illustration from Saint-Exupery's *Little Prince*, the child standing all alone on the edge of the planet. I lay down and covered myself. I looked at the curtains of the room and they turned to a gauzy gold. The whole room became filled with gold, as if by a strong sun. The walls turned to gold, the bedcover was gold, my whole body was becoming gold, liquid gold, scintillating, warm gold. I was GOLD. It was the most pleasurable sensation I had ever known, like an orgasm. It was the secret of life, the alchemist's secret of life. From the feeling of intense cold, as if I were chloroformed, of loss of gravity of the legs, and diminution in size, I passed to the sensation of being gold.

Suddenly I was weeping, weeping. I could feel the tears and I saw the handkerchief in my hand.

Weeping to the point of dissolution. Why should I be weeping? I could see Gil smiling, and realized the absurdity of weeping when traveling through space. As soon as the concept of absurdity struck me, the comic spirit appeared again. It was another Anaïs, not the one which was lying down weeping, but a small, gay, light Anaïs, very lively, very restless and mobile. The comic spirit of Anaïs was aware of Gil's predicament: "Poor Gil, you are out with an ordinary weepy female! What a ridiculous thing to spoil a voyage through space by weeping. But before we go on, I want to explain to you why women weep: IT IS THE QUICKEST WAY TO REJOIN THE OCEAN. You liquefy, become fluid, flow back into the ocean where the colors are more beautiful." The comic spirit of Anaïs shook herself jauntily and said: "Let's stop this weeping. Everything is more wonderful under water (than in space?). It is alive and it breathes." Space was lonely, and empty, a vast desert. After the feeling of GOLD I had a feeling of danger. My world is so beautiful, so beautiful, but so fragile. I was pleading for protection of this evanescent beauty. I thought I was the quickest mind alive and the quickest with words, but words cannot catch up with these transformations, metamorphoses. They are beyond words, beyond words. The Oriental cities vanished and the infinite appeared again, but now it was bordered on each side by the celestial gardens of precious stones on silver and gold stems. Temptation not to pursue the infinite, but to enjoy the gardens. Space is definitely without sensuous appeal.

The comic spirit of Anaïs stood aside and laughed at so much Russian-opera extravaganza. But the other Anaïs maintained her pose as a Balinese dancer with legs slightly bent, the tips of the fingers meeting in a symbolic gesture of pleading.

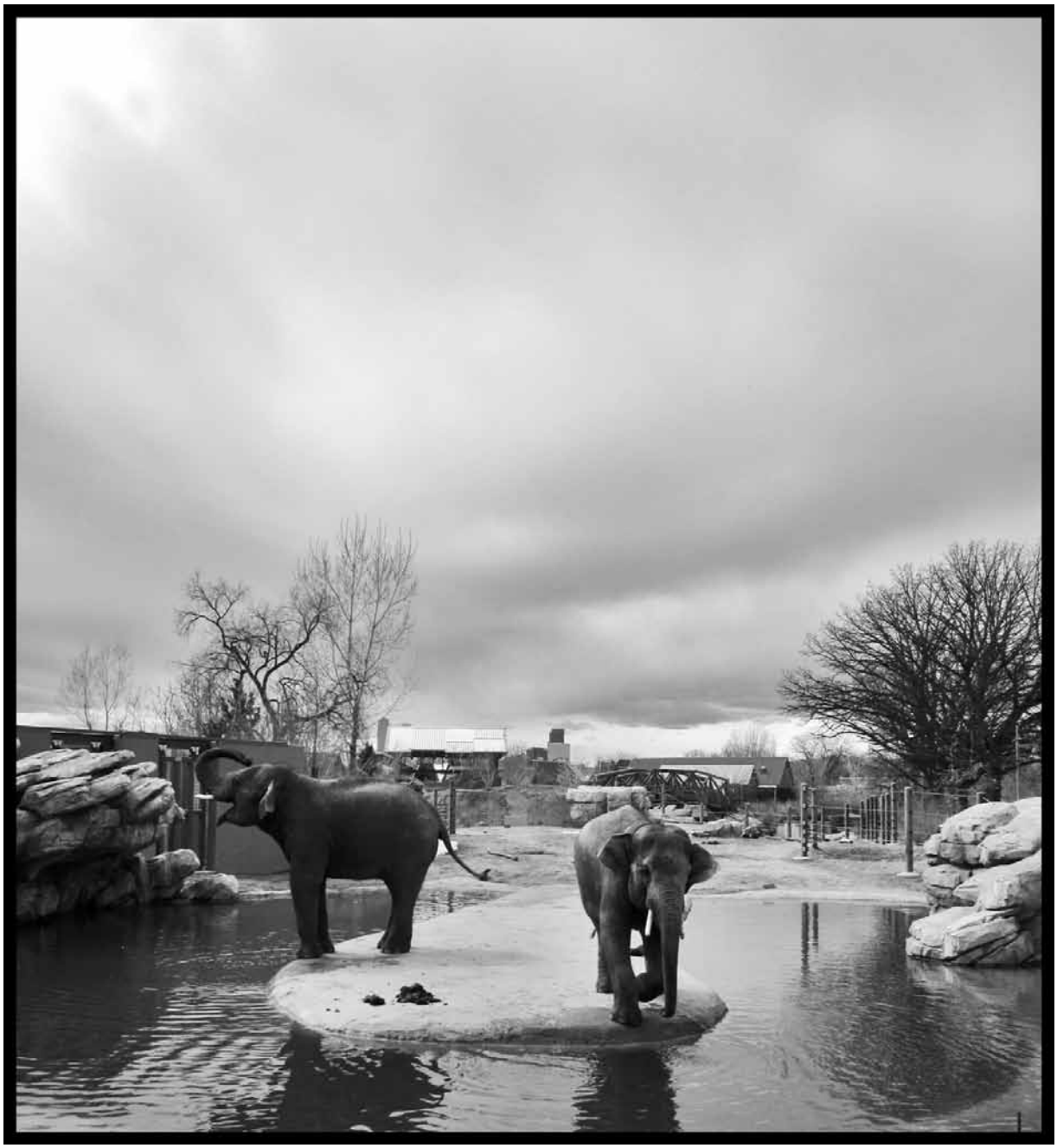
I watched a shoreline of gold waves breaking into solid gold powder and becoming gold foam, and gold hair, shimmering and trembling with gold delights. I felt I could capture the secret of life because the secret of life was metamorphosis and transmutation, but it happened too quickly and was beyond word. Comic spirit of Anaïs mocks words and herself. *Ah, I cannot capture the secret of life with WORDS.*

Sadness.

The secret of life was BREATH. That was what I always wanted words to do, to BREATHE. Comic spirit of Anaïs rises, shakes herself within her cape, gaily, irresponsibly, surrenders to the mystery of life.

Now I know why fairy tales are full of jewels.

* * * * * *



Tom Sheehan

Nearly Saugus When I was Young

It is always nearly Saugus
No matter where I am,
Coming from anyplace, going to,
Sure as snow or crocus after,
Or the clock turning on,
Sure as clam flats on air,
And kelp bubbles breaking down,
Under confection of dry salt,
And the river knowing its wares,
Through nine-foot cat-o-nines
Standing ripe as fire arrows.

Saugus announcements are made
With conviction all along the line.
In Linden, just south where
Four roads cross themselves neutral,
The sad, gray Hawkridge Brothers
Steel Company building lays its
Washboard face to the sun,
And brings back old Mondays,
And mother's sad red hands,
Twisting denim almost dry,
And pain not quite touchable.

There is the blunt realism
Of the awesome bomb crater,
Where the stone crusher
For years has harvested
The neat beehives of pulverized
Earth bone you cannot see over,
Even if you were laddered.
Only the sea is past it,
Occasional sails, slow freighters,
Like dominoes on the horizon.
Nothing to look for except *Outward,*
Past Revere and the dream beach.

Linden talks about Saugus
As you pass through its gauntlet
Of rail-side steel, neat square
Deliveries of girders, building guts,
Lally columns, T-bar stock stacked
Parallel to rust, inhibitions of trade,
Bankruptcy or intestate dreams;

And over there, where the earth
Has a mouth you cannot believe,
Where all the dead you've known
Could hide for a hundred years,
Where granite screams downward,
From pent house dynamiting,
Where a bomb blast could run out
Of its own echoes all Saturdays,
Where dust reaches for the millennium,
And ledge vibrations last all week,
And the Earth talks in broken windows,
And plastered ceilings sneer wall to wall,
Like lunatics on yesterday's back porch,
Saugus says it's here.

Lynn announces, too,
Though on the other side,
And aches at the touch
Of a shoe last found cheaply
At a Saturday yard sale.
Lynn has walked the border
Only in dead winter when the river
Zippers the towns together
At a barometer's instigation
And thermometer's direction.
The parts meet where industry
Heaves upward red mickey spires,
Erecting at dollar signs,
Government contracts, defense
And offense better planned
In a Manning Bowl locker room.

Lynn says hello to Saugus.
I wave back, the tracks
Of the Linden Branch walk under
My feet like I am skipping rope,
And the cinders from a thousand
Dead engines and more Pullmans
Than you can shake a fist at
Litter the way onto Saugus,
Even where the river collapses
Under the State Theater,
Where now centerless grinders
Reel on like old serials
With week-long after-tastes.

No matter how I go at Saugus,
By Linden or Lynn, Schenectady or sin,
Collegiate enterprise or business boredom,
By rock slabs and earth holes,
And ores crossed in a man's mind,
And guard-rails narrowed to infinity,
Nothing prepares the way better
For coming home than the flotsam
Freed upon the air, old friends
Cornerwise on busy days,
Old train whistles falling across
Donkey Field chockfull of October,
Where Halloween goes orange,
And shaggy-toothed and waxy,
For nothing ever said I would ever
Write a poem about coming here
To read a poem about going there.

* * * * * *

Martina Newberry

Morning Glories

Bitter unkind autumn,
when the gloaming grips the sky,
whines like a whipped dog.

The light produces an
exquisite ungainliness,
a clumsy attempt at dance.

At night, a small light,
only as bright as
a single candle,

shows me the dark mouth
of the closet door
open to devour or expiate

my sins by sacrificing sleep.
Autumn is a pliable
sort of mourning. And, still,

a mourning in deed.
Years ago, I called my mother
to tell her my morning glories

had bloomed. “And what,”
she asked me “is so glorious
about mornings?”

A flood of fear made
my scalp tingle, my mouth
dried up. I had no answer

then. I do now. Now
I would tell her that
any morning you wake up

is glorious and all sins
Are forgiven as long as you
keep the closet door closed.

* * *

Wardrobe

The light is escaping the sky. I've rifled
through my lingerie drawer more times than I can
count, searching . . . Where is the "I" who cleaned the house,
drove for errands, offered gourmet meals, made love
like a young man's myth? . . . The drawer doesn't hold a
clue, nor does the mirror, nor does the puddle
on the sidewalk out front (and I do check it
frequently) . . . So why do I continue to
look for her . . . that "I" who is misplaced? . . . I want
to give her something . . . something she can keep with
her now that she is in a safe place . . . a song,
a sweet gesture, a bracelet, a birthday cake.

* * * * * *

Raymond Soulard, Jr.

Labyrinthine
[a new fixtion]

"I must create a system,
or be enslaved by another man's"
—William Blake, "Jerusalem."

The Boat Wagon is a quite nice place to nap, many soft blankets & pillows, & one tends to size up or down to need, depending on one's companions, so I settle in the back, the Kittys & Friend Fish already nicely napping in the front as they do.

Safe in this strange wonderful vehicle as the few hours come & go, & then she's waking me.

"Ray, come on. Let's go."
"Umf. Hey, what's your name again?"
"Haha! Our joke. Really, it's Rey too, just spelled differently from yours."
I nod like sure, that's right, haha.

Back into the store & we hurry right away to the back. I don't even know who's running the register now. Eh.

She takes my hand like trust & affection & just how it is & we go into the cooler & into the far back. There a curtain in a corner, casual, like nothing.

But not nothing. Push it aside & a door, & her confident hand leads me down a long dark staircase, darker & darker & it's like fading on the way down, she grips harder just to stay even & I think I'm near completely gone not just her hold when light, imagined, then real, then we're arrived.

She knows how to unlock this door, involves a key & some cackling I think & a few strange dancing gestures too. Then opens & we go through.

Shorter than me, in height only, she stands me square up just inside the doorway, hallway stretching out behind her. Stands me up & talks.

"You can't stay long."
"How long?"
"Not long, Ray."
"How long, Rey?"
She huffs at me then nods like OK. "Slow count to 36. But *that's it*. More than that, you won't get out the same way."

I nod, sudden kiss her friend's cheek, & then start walking along, & counting with each step. Try to become deeper aware of all this.

This hallway is about six feet wide, not much taller than my own six foot height. Lit softly, like a glowing dream, no fixtures, a milky vagueness to it all, & I listen deep as I can & there is indeed a *hmmm* down low here. OK. Keep counting.

20. 21. 22. Way down there a door becomes vaguely visible. OK. 26. 27. 28. I can't seem to hurry here. It's closer but I'm nearly out of numbers. I know Rey is wondering me by now. I keep going. OK. I keep going.

36. I arrive. There's something written on the door in black ink, like the pens I use. *How?*

It's a *Hmmm*. Seems to be one that goes on & off. *Hmmm*, pause a beat, *hmmm*, pause a beat. I study. I memorize like it's everything. Turn the golden doorknob flicked with green, & push the door in. Here I am. *Whatever this is.*

An empty room. A white empty room. Not very large. I walk in & nearly forget to keep up my *hmmm*. Then I notice a something. Center of the room. There when I *hmmm*, not when I pause a beat. I walk carefully over to it. *Hmmm,* pause*, hmmm*.

Pick it up. *It's the indigo Beacon.*

In my arms it feels solid, heavy, & I keep up my *hmmming* now because I'm not sure I can get back, long past 36.

But this Beacon is *hmmming* with me too. *Hmmm*, a beat, *hmmm*, & whatever the why of it I feel like I can do this, get back. What is this *Hmmm*? Magic? Er, um, that's not enough of the right word.

So back down the vaguely glowing hallway, steadily, maybe a bit faster, like my recent passage is still fresh, footprints of some kind, weird kind but OK, true, yes.

And there is Rey, lovely dear friend I just met, known so long, like so many of my dreams, hugging me & indigo Beacon &, funny to say, it does not blink in her grasp. Steady indigo.

We climb back up the stairs & out to cooler room.

Someone stirs in my green plaid jacket's front pocket. *Oh. Oh. Pirth.* Been napping? Been invisible.

He's reaching purple paw forward, as best he can, to Rey. She sees, smiles like a darling, leans forward for his pat upon her nose.

It's time to go. I don't want to leave her. We're sitting at a table in the cafe performance area, Pirth dancing happily between us on its top.

"I like you, Rey."
"I like you too."
"I mean, you're new & novel & here you are in this long long book, & I want to keep you, introduce you to Maya, Bowie, Christina, all the many rest."
She laughs. "You think I don't know them?"
"Do you?"
She points to a shadowy corner near us. I now see it's piled high with . . . *Cenacle*s? Whoa.
"Every Saturday night I work second shift, that radio behind the counter plays your show, loud."
She smiles.
Hmm.

"I've written about you before too."
She nods. "Giving me a name is new though. Thank you. Like the girl in the *Star Wars* movies."
"Yah. And like mine."
"Both."
She reaches forward across the table to me, niftily amongst Pirth's dancings, grasps my hand.
"I'll be here."
I nod.
"Now go make those Thought Fleas happy."
I nod, smile. More hugs, kisses on the cheek, pats on the nose. Pirth & I go.

xciv.

Pirth & I w/Beacon come out of the Market & there is the Boat Wagon still safe & waiting & we walk right over & hop right into the back, buckle in (*safety first!*), & I nod to the Kittees to get us going. "To my Hut, if you please," I say politely.

So off we drive through the White Woods, & I awe at its strange, powerful beauty. Wonder why these Woods so close to my heart. I remember, as a boy, there were some woods near the neighborhood I lived in, best entered by a vacant lot usually used for ball games.

I was forbidden by my mother to go into them, & so I no more ventured than a few feet within. Oh, she was right, I *could* have been hurt or killed in them, but why not take me in with her? Or my father? Why hold Woods responsible for mostly human dangers? Why treat the world like it responsible for the violent flaws of men? Why treat the world too as lesser than men?

Whatever these Woods be, men do not rule them. They glow with magic & mystery & *do not burn*.

I probably fall asleep in the lovely safe Boat Wagon, among its pillows & blankets.

Wake, & here we are at my Hut. I give the Kittees & Friend Fish each & all an affectionate pat & walk up to my Hut. Pass my Burning Man 2003 pendant across the plaque of the crazy-smiling imp. Soft cackle & door opens.

It's a lovely little Hut. I enter & walk over to my armchair. Next to it, a low chest. Lift up, & set the Beacon down among the blankets & pillows within, for safe-keeping.

What I need to wait for is the Thought Fleas weekly production in the Great Clearing. That will be the right moment to reveal the recovered prize.

Time passes. I sit in my old comfy armchair. A memory of one I had years, decades ago, when a young man, when less of life had come & gone. When the idea of come & gone was different, less rife with staying wounds.

Eventually the night comes & it's time to get to the Clearing.

I push aside my armchair, & I pull open the trapdoor which leads to the Column below, this time climbing down it, not up, the Beacon now in a shoulder bag I bear along, climb down stair after stair, until I come upon a strange glowing green & gold door, of course, & push in, & tis dark, & low, & I crawl & crawl, a long way in the dark, crawl & crawl, & then suddenly emerge from what looks like a cave mouth, the sounds of laughter & festivaling is nearby, easy to follow until I arrive to the elongated Great Clearing where the Thought Fleas & many others are gathered as part of their weekly Production, & also of course the Rutabaga Festival & Fleastock is going on, where the great Kettle of Rutabaga Soup is free for all, bowls & spoons a-plenty, two ladles for use,

Yes, so, here I am at this known & loved event with my surprise to reveal. But I take my time about this. Watch the events of the Production unfold as they do, & here tell.

There is at the far end of the Clearing an old platform atop which sets a venerable stage. From beyond this stage, from the Woods, come marching out, signaling the start, the Royal Thumbs, dressed in their Royal Crowns & Capes. They march into the clearing up the steps of the platform to the stage, & are cheered & cheered & cheered as well-known FOF (Friends of Fleas)!

They accept this cheering for an elongated moment, & then cry out: "Greetings! Felicitations! And Sal-u-ta-tions! Pre-senting . . . A Royal Thumbs Production of . . . One . . . Big . . . Thought Flea . . . Sea Flea!"

And out comes marching the mysterious One Big Thought Flea-Sea Flea, one & many Fleas together with a handsome faux leather cape.

The Royal Thumbs, who had tossed themselves wildly in the direction of the OBTF-SFs' entrance, & been only saved by crash into some well-placed cushions, donated by certain anonymous Benefactresses, slide off to the side, & OBTF-SF comes up to the stage to receive many cheers too.

Then, from the far end of the Clearing, marches in the Ladies Toe, for whom the crowds of the Fleas & others divide in twine to let pass.

I am watching all this when someone nudges me awake & I realize I fell asleep again.

"You're up, CC!"

I hustle my raggedy self up toward the stage, through the crowd of friendly big-eyed Fleas & others who pat me on the back. Climb the steps of the platform, to the stage, nod to OBTF-SF & the Royal Thumbs, & turn to look at the assembly.

"Working at Chief Seattle's Friendly Market succeeded as I made a valuable friend & she got me down

into the buried spaceship!" I say slowly & try to big my voice. Cheers go up, reassuring me.

"We went down & then I continued on my own &, well, here it is!" & I pull the indigo Beacon from my knapsack & raise it high. The cheers go on & on.

"There's more," I say, settling for quiet with my hands. I look up toward the skies & start to cackle merrily.

Eventually, a strange little spaceship that looks like a kind of wee tugboat descends to view.

"Tis our friend the Cacklebird in her Space Tugboat, come to help!" I cry.

Everyone cheers again as the Space Tugboat hovers over me & I screw the indigo Beacon into a place in the Tugboat's bottom hull. It blinks on & off, on & off, serenely.

I nod, the Cacklebird cackles merrily, & the Space Tugboat flies high up again, the indigo Beacon blinking very brightly for all to see. Right up, higher & higher, & we all watch & wait as the Beacon seems to send out a brighter & brighter blinking light, broadcasting its signal to farther & farther places, & we are more & more hopeful that this will finally work.

And then, faintly, faintly, *rumble, rumble, rumble.*

"Come on, everyone!" I call. "Let's go to the Model Islands clearing! Hurry!"

I ran through the crowds & led the way from this big clearing, through the White Woods, to another clearing devoted to the Fleastock art. Right now, just one model Island but the *rumble rumble rumble* grew louder.

And here they came. Unlike anything ever to be seen before or ever again.

They move through the earth itself, like water through water, coming as though from all different directions, bound for the clearing, a *hmmming* now part of the air around all of us as we run, & somehow they pass through the Woods in the same way in which they had fled, nothing harmed in their passage, almost like disembodied, or at least flexibly loose as they travelled

& then to reassemble as they each arrived to the water at the edge of the Wide Wide Sea surrounding the Fleastock clearing, & on in now fully or more fully cohering, to arrive each to a place among its fellows, united again, so happy, model Islands united again!

Many White Woods denizens, & the Fleas many amongst them, cheered & cheered the Islands. *Happy, happy, happy.*

I realized my visit, this one anyway, to these White Woods is coming to a conclusion. But I need to find Flossie Flea before I go.

I am smaller among these Fleas, & Pirth no longer in my green plaid shirt's front pocket. I figure he's somewhere nearby & I will see him too again. He is ever my friend.

Somehow I drift from the Fleastock clearing & back among the Woods & walking aimlessly along. I

figure I'll find her. *It's part of the story.*

And I come to the CC Hut indeed again. It is a glowing MeZmer the White Bunny color on the outside. So glows like the White Woods all around.

Slide my Burning Man 2003 pendant necklace across the merry laughing face of the Imp on the door's plaque. *Cackle, cackle*, door opens.

Enter. Walk over to my old green armchair & sit down.

"Hello, CC, again," says Flossie Flea, sitting in the armchair across from mine.
Oh. I nod, smile.
She stands up & walks over to me with something in her paw. It is a red colored medal, of a, um, rutabaga? Green & gold T & F etched on it.
"This is for you. For helping us." She pins the medal on my green plaid jacket, the right side, opposite the pocket where Pirth would ride.
"Thank you," I say, humbled.

She kisses my cheek & leaves with a wave, & a smile, & nary a word.

xcv.

What is this book of 3233 pages & 11½ years? Written now for over decade, through moves & jobs & passings, goings, comings, etc. etc. etc.?

I write it because I love it, because it is me at my best, because I got tired of ending stories & starting new ones.

Like me, it has no wished for or intended endgame. Goes on & on, insists on so.

Sitting in a living room, on a white couch known nearly 5 years, with my wife & best friend of nearly 15 years. In a house our own, so many good hours & the rest more mundane.

It's winter again. President Clusterfuck for a ruinous year now.

Tomorrow the Super Bowl, this region hoping for another football championship.

A new complex weird & fine movie about a figure skater whose talent raised her up, & rotten origins took her down.

My weekly radio show on in 35 min.

When then? Resume back into the waters. Not too hard, & much fun.

Tripping high seed juice & black pen & this lovely old notebook & Polly iPod full of new Wood Brothers music.

It's time to unite the Six Islands.
It's time for this book to dive ever deeper into helping.

What next? Is what's next.
That's how it works.

Maya.

xcvi.

We sit together, somewhere. Her purple eyes glint. Her hair blonde & pink-striped like ever. Her scrawny as Creatures.

She waits. Smiles me. But waits.

"I'm not sure."
"Yet."
"No."
"Soon?"
"I don't know."
"Tell."
"There are Six Islands to this world. Long ago, they became scattered. Recently, efforts have been made to unite them, not how they were, but new & sure again."
She nods.
"I don't know where this book fits in to all that."
"Does it?"
I nod. I think so.
"Are you sure?"
"Yes. I want it to."
"Why?"
"I want all I write to be of one world, shaggy & various & scattered, but still one."
"What then?"
I shake my head a little. We're now in my hut, in the CC Hut, in the White Woods. Maya is sitting in the other armchair across from mine.

She smiles. Looks around its comfortable crowdedness. Nods.
"What now?"
"I stay. You go."
"Go where?"
I point to the door. "Out there. White Woods. Kinley & Christina & Dylan are waiting." Peers me close. "Why?"
"I need to recede. I'm shadowing over this book. I'll go to back to writing it, not starring too, & you bunch & others will do what you do better."
"Are you sure?"
I nod.
"Are you OK, Raymond?"
"Just figure it out for me. Find the hook. Go to the Festival."

xcvii.

The trick to it all is to remember hours like this one, writing with all my lights turned on, keep this magic then when I need it so much. When the bars are heavy & close all around, as they often are. But

don't have to be.

xcviii.

They are indeed waiting for her outside of the little glowing hut. Smiling, all of them.

Dylan offers his hand & she feels the old shy hesitation, but maybe a bit less. But she doesn't move then.

"Where are we going?"
They shake their heads.
"He told me to figure it out. He wants us to go to the Festival."
They nod, agreeably.
She's not satisfied. "We've all been part of this a long time."
"Years, it seems," Kinley says softly.
"We need to help."
"How?" asks Dylan, looking curiously at her. They all are.
"He was talking about uniting the 6 Islands. Like that's important to him."
Christina, not usually one for sentiment, or subtlety, motions them over to a lovely white oak nearby. Patch of green grass beneath it. Her impulse to find the Festival, she restrains it. This first.

Sitting in a circle, holding hands.

Maya closes her purple eyes, is quiet awhile, & then begins to *hmmm* softly & steadily. The others one by one follow her, eyes closed, *hmmming*.

Hmmm is you could say the native tongue of the White Woods & I guess elsewhere. So its sonorous noise attracts others.

Creatures, likely to shy too approach people-folks, yet tis Maya & she is a special friend to Creatures. They know the others too, but her most of all.

Maya feels a warm someone in her lap. Small, floppy ears. MeZmer the White Bunny she knows, eyes still closed.

She urges MeZmer to join in their *Hmmm*, & others hidden nearby too. They have a question & are expressing it in this way, to reach out to those in these magickal White Woods, reach out for their help in the asking.

A small grey hedgedyhog hops into Christina's lap & she skritches its back as a thank-ye.

Dylan gets two small Giraffes for his lap, gentle & safe to their sniff.

Kinley feels the so-so-soft fur of a White Tiger, lap-sized.

Many others are near, all now *hmmming* too, helping the question to pass from place to place, denizen to denizen.

A voice, a kind of collective voice, begins to speak with Maya.
"What is the Festival?"

"Welcomes all. Feeds all."
"How do we unite the Islands?"
"The Rainbow Wheel now does that."
"What can we do for you?"
"Dance. Sing. Share."
"How can we help?"
"*Dance. Sing. Share.*"
"Is there danger?"
"Everything always changes."
Kinley's voice now. "Where is new to travel?"

There is silence.

"The Model is new here."

They open their eyes. This seems an answer.

xcix.

The trick of it all is to remember hours like this one, writing with all my lights turned on, all seven rainbow colors, turning thought music into words visible on the page & doing this more & more

I remember I forget I remember

c.

"Alright, let's go," said Kinley. Stands, with White Tiger in grasp.
The others stand with their Creatures in arm too. At least for the moment.

But then luck with them as up rolls those famous bloo-eyed Kittees & their Friend Fish in their famous Boat Wagon!

"That's the thing about these White Woods," Christina laughs & smirks. "You never go wanting for a ride."

So we all get in the back seat of the Boat Wagon, except Maya, who sits up front like she's a special one to the Creatures. Which she is.

All buckle in. *Safety first!*

The bloo-eyed black & white Kittees share a large steering wheel between them, steering with soft white paws, in concert, while between them sits their dear & quiet Friend Fish, beautiful yellow with pretty red lips—down below, Kittee paws pedal along at quite a speed—

Maya notices how this Boat Wagon *hmmms* very softly if she listens down low, like it is not a vehicle but a being too, & this drive is shared by all, is gift to all, of going, & going together—

She tries to remember other days when she was not riding with her dear friends Christina & Kinley, & her new-old love Dylan, in back, & these magickal Creatures taking them along through these beautiful

& pathless White Woods—

There were scary days, lonely days, ones of wanting, lifetimes & lifetimes, are any worth missing?

She looks back at her friends sitting close together. All smiling at her, Dylan's a sort of sideways one, he's shy too, & guesses *no, this is good*

And awhile it's just peddle-peddle-peddle & pretty White Woods passing by, pathless but they go along fine—

She dozes, leaning a little against the Kittee next to her, & falls a little into a dream,

in it she is traveling her past years, it's like a mix of them, a bit of that bus ride with Dylan, & that city they roamed with John, & even these White Woods, beneath them somehow, *yes, OK, impatient, come on,*

now she's sitting in a coffeehouse at a table on the second floor, a kind of mezzanine overlooking the main floor, its tall ceiling & bookcases, & shiny coffee urns.

Open on the table before her is a thick notebook. Turns to first page:

Labyrinthine

[a new fixtion]

Oh, her copy? That was an idea she'd forgotten about.

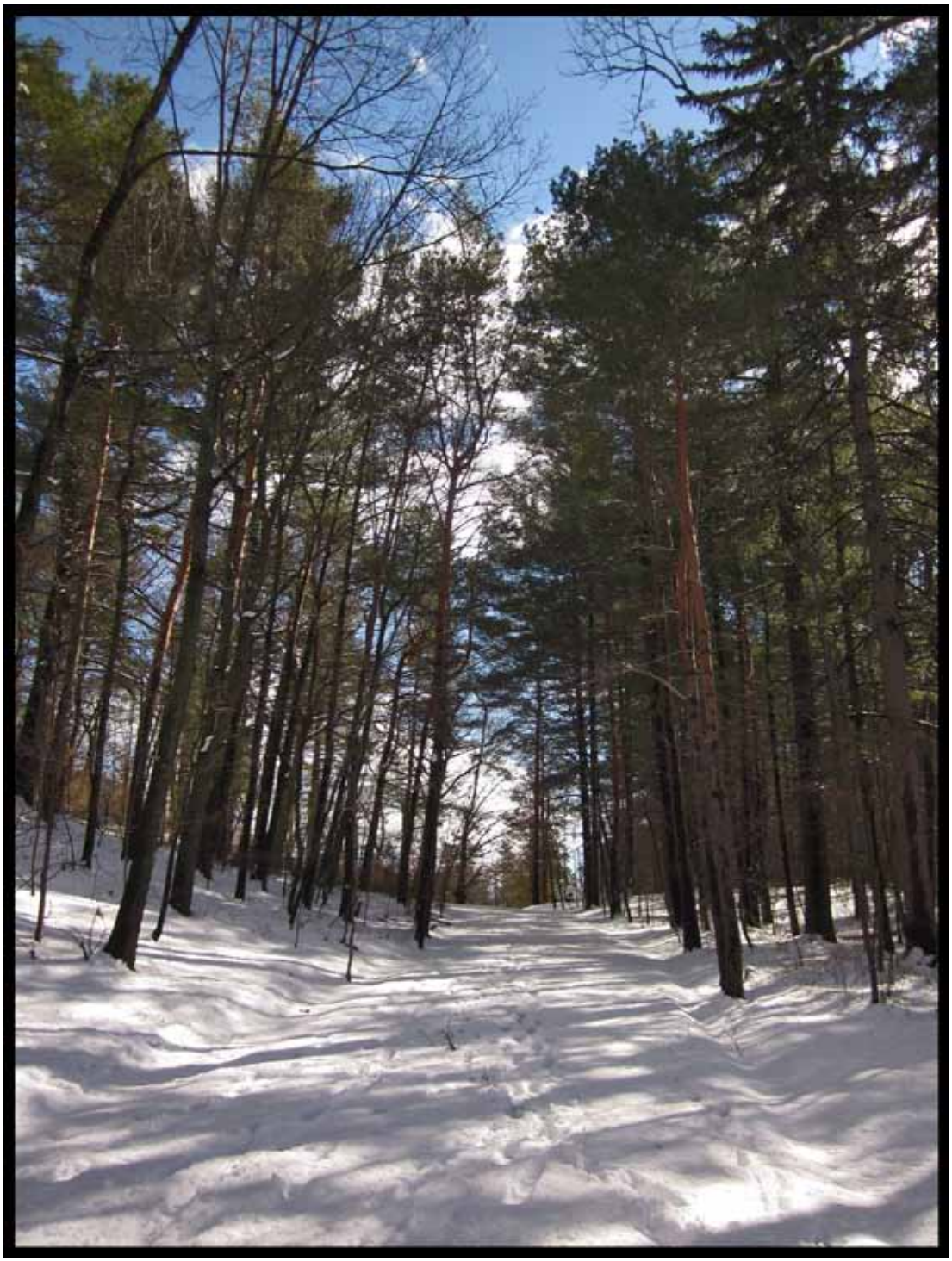
She turns to the current pages & reads about her & the others in the Boat Wagon, riding through the White Woods, till she dozes & arrives here.

Nods. OK. Sets to writing. Black pen.

I see a tall tall building through the tall tall windows here. Is it a space-ship? Hm. I suppose it might be. It gleams from workmen polishing but is also worn down in places. Comes & goes a lot.

Shakes her head. Summons him.

"Hi."
"Hi, Maya."
"Why this?"
"Dunno. You were getting bored."
"This is Bauhaus in Seattle?"
"Well, the one I remember. It's gone now."
" "
"What?"
" "
"Would you like to go back to the White Woods? Arrive?"
" "



"Wake up, Maya!" Christina is nudging her gently.

There they are. In a clearing that contains a Model of the Ancient 6 Islands. Look about a dozen feet high at their tallest. A Sea fills the clearing. Couple feet deep?

Maya nods. The Kittees peddle them into the water, & then paddle from thereon. *Splish splash splish.*

Do they shink or do the Islands grow in size? Not long before the Island look great big as Islands usually do. Now they are small, or at least proportional again.

Kinley leans forward. "Kittees, please paddle us to the nearest one. That's where our adventures will begin here." Smiles at her. Eager. Happy.

Yes, Maya thinks. *This now here is just fine*

ci.

We sail close to the rocky shores but not quite a place for the Boat Wagon to land so Kinley calls, "All out!"

We wade, swim, clumsy stumble our way to the shore.

Now standing wet & assessing.

The Boat Wagon remains in the shallows, waiting, I guess, drivers willing to nap for a good stretch while we adventure.

MeZmer the White Bunny is with us, me supposing the others are leaving us to her care.

A sniff seems enough for the four of us as she turns & hops up the shore to those White Woods. She's small but fast & so we have to hurry.

"Kinley"
"Christina"
"Not that this isn't fun."
"Not."
"Which it is."
"Tis."
"Kinley!"
"Christina."

I interrupt laughing, half-ignoring Dylan's hand holding mine.

"She's wondering about how all this is so."
Christina nods me smiling. *Go on.*

"Well, just your thoughts."
Nod smile. *More.*

"And as many words as you'd like."
"Promise?"
Two, no three, nods.

He's like a wound up spring of words, just waiting. Wow! how he loves her! Wow! how she loves him.

"I could tell you that there is no science for" gestures around, "*any of this*. Or how we trusting follow that White Bunny knowing she's likely smarter than all of us together."

A possible appreciative sniff calls back from among the pathless trees of the softly glowing Woods we are in.

"What then, Kinley?" Christina's voice is faux-impatient. She can do that.

"We dwell in these places we have travelled in & they are imaginal realms."

"Imaginal?" asks Dylan, quietly, eagerly for him.

Kinley's quiet for a bit.

"I think what we all want to know is what to do, is what is our part in this strange story."

Their breaths nod.

"I don't know. It's shifted. As all kinds of worlds do."

I think we all agree with this I talk before I know it.

"It's like what's come before is more factual than useful."
A pause. For effect. *He's good.*
"And not so obviously either."

These Woods are as pretty as always. We walk a long time in silence after that, a friendly one, words optional.

MeZmer becomes an occasional hopping blur, waiting but barely now so we begin to hurry, unsure why. I lose myself as I do when with MeZmer in these Woods, more bunny blur than girl too. I think we take a fair distance over the others.

Then, suddenly, arrived, tis a great big patch of beautiful green ferns. She hops us all right to the center where, so thick, like a couch to share among us, them panting caught up.

One word: "FernKassi."

Then her little grey hedgedyhog friend Holly suddenly appears to greet in his squeaking tongue.

We cluster close. Dylan is smiling as charmed as I've seen him. His look is wonder, & even happiness.

Kinley somehow has brought a knapsack with blankets & water & food of the nuts & dried raisins

kind. We have a wonderful feast in this magick green patch with our magick little friends in these magick White Woods.

"On a Model Island?" someone says & everyone laughs.

Clustered like Creatures, we quiet & listen. It's not so long to hear the *hmmm* in all things here.

We join it, not planned, not ordered, a sort of ragged quartet of croaks for awhile till I think we each realize to close eyes, *breathe, relax,* & let it come through us, each one uniquely. The more let, the better, sweeter, truer, oddly each our own.

Stars by the bajillions in those great night skies above. Safe, peaceful, whatever it all is.

["From 30,000 feet high the White Woods looks like many more possible things than it logically should, like brown flat landscapes, like icy reaches in dark blue waters, like strips of clouds impossibly low to the ground, like also & mostly endless pathless (mostly) trees, glowing trees, lightly glowing trees, variously glowing trees, metallic objects high low, born natural from the muck of ancient & future civilizations—"

[Marie laughs. "Where were you & Tumbleweed in all this?"

[Daniel smiles. "Well, it was the Master Air Current we'd come upon who offered us a ride & showed off a few tricks involving Alternative Gravity & multiple perspective."

[Joe traces his fingers in the faded ancient stains on their kitchen table. "Alternative Gravity? Are you ever going to tell us what that really means?"]

MeZmer & Holly are showing their four people-folks friends how to strum the fern leaves, & *hmmm* very lightly to hear stories they know to tell of—each leave a different story, & each story varying with many possible *hmmm*s there are—

cii.

Somehow the chaos of imps & Global Wall's girls end up back in the Attic together, in that first room they started in, still dreaming, but pulled back from how far they'd gone—

They find their copies of *Labyrinthine*, tiny spectacles all around, & catch up on the book since their last appearance—

Unusually, the imps show some interest in these books & sort of race cackling up to the girls where each sits, & sort of leap with a merry cry right into the books—

Ulp!—ulp!—ulp! ulp! ulp! ulp!

Once inside the three copies the imps redouble their speed to knit them together, if oddly, pages from early connected to much later ones, events reordered, double, trebled, until three are become one as strangely deep now as it is long—its many multiple tracks running atwist each other—

Then they pop! out with a cackle & are gone.

ciii.

This book has passed through these High Plains a few times over the years, its flat fields of corn, long windy nights, houses of neighbors miles from each other, & further to the nearest small town.

There was a story kind of set in this farmhouse many many pages ago, with a black & white collie, now long deceased, & also set at an old motel in town near here, motel recently levelled.

I'm visiting kinfolks & reviewing this book in my free time, making many notes toward what next. Writing a few new pages, like this one, but not too many.

About 13 years of visiting here—
About, near, 12 years of *Labyrinthine*

I tried today twice to explain this book to a kinfolk I especially hold dear. The six gun shots, the Tangled Gate myth. *What is this book about?* Everything, I say, though vaguely.

My beloved & I today took many pictures of a rusty & moldering playground surrounded by brown winter fields. Merry-go-round, swing set, jungle jim, two slides, steel but sinking—black cows approached from afar when I creaked back & forth on the swing set. Chewed, watched, waited, left—

I often think of loved ones lost & far. Wonder if they dream of me as I dream of them. Glad I have loved ones here. Try to be a good guest, good conversationalist, worthy their fond affections—

My beloved is sleeping in this, her old bedroom, while I sit here in a rocking armchair nearby. She lived in this room when we met. Talked long hours on the phone, some of it quite sexual. This obscure truth turns me on. Our romance & love & sexual beginnings *here*, this *room*. She may be less self-entangled to think of such things.

Much of my past is useless. Pain, boredom, frustration, horniness. Books, music, films, TV, on the better hand. Regret in a hundred colors on the worse one.

She sleeps peacefully, quietly, her breath even.

Nothing in this passage to move the story along. A snapshot from a darkened farmhouse in eastern Colorado, around midnight in early spring. A little lamp like an upside down tulip for a light covering, black metal base. Two windows meet at corner of the room, heavy green curtains. Bookcases. Flowers stencilled on the walls along the border to the ceiling. I first came to this room about two years after those hot, sweet phone calls. Till married, slept in basement downstairs.

I guess that's enough. Sleep calls.

civ.

Wow. That was a lot of reading. Them's a lot of notes I took. It was a kind of penance for neglect, weird to say.

A story can lose some of its propulsion, feed more on its momentum than produce new energies. It happens.

I have been lately reading about the Monkees, a somewhat recalled 1960s band & media creation. I noticed something in the arc of this story I'd never realized.

Phase One – Assemble 4 handsome young men with comic timing & TV chemistry to portray a rock band—yet they are not simply fakes—they sing—they want to play—they struggle to gain their autonomy on what they are.

Phase Two – They mature, learn their struggles' lessons, & become something unexpected. Something really good. Culminates in a film they make that embraces & explodes their quasi-fictional story.

Phase Three – They skyrocket the skies awhile, then discover in the coming story, which will be less fictional, they want to separate. They do.

Phase Four – Slowly, eventually, who they are, were, weren't, might & might not have been, comes to peace. It's OK to be yourself & a Monkee.

Maya laughs *out loud*. Like a choking snort. Um. Yah. OK. I guess.

Somehow I'm back on these pages & we're back in the CC hut. Um. OK?

"You guys were having a great time visiting FernKassi."

Nods all around.

"Then why return here?"
Shrugs. Smiles.

"I mean, I have some ideas on how to mix & combine & expand various recent themes & narratives."

Nods. Smiles.

"OK. OK. It's sort of numerical & involves a little blue-green coin purse of icons."

Waiting.

"OK, can we go to see Rey along the way to bringing you back to FernKassi?"

cv.

Chief Seattle's Friendly Market, early evening. Rey is fending off a long line for cigarettes & White Woods lotto tickets (*what??*).

Nor surprised to see us, & smiling, motions us to go sit in the cafe & wait for her break. We friendly do.

Gets quiet, as the traffic through the White Woods (*??*) slows eventually, & she comes over to sit with us.

I introduce everyone & it's like now Maya & Christina & Rey are the oldest sisterly bond in history.

"I'm only gay because of you two."
They laugh.
"He needed one female inspirer who he wasn't wanting to get seduced by."

More laughter.

Before everyone gets too comfortable, I stand.

"I have to walk home & DJ the show Rey will be blasting on her stereo," I explain, pointing, smiling, failing to impress.

But OK, I can't write when actually walking home, so they'll let up on me for now.

cvi.

Walking home I listened on my beloved Polly iPod to an XTC song called "Wheel & the Maypole," over & over, as I have before, & new this time realized it's about the end of love, the world, all ties, all matter, & —XTC. Last song, last album.

"Everything decays . . ."

And I thought, nearing end of my 45 minute night walk home, let me forgive & accept me, & find peace in life, *today, now,* let go & walk on,

let go and walk on
let go & walk on
let go & walk on

cvii.

Rey holds my hand, like it will help, & it does.

"You're something dear, lost, & now recovered again."
She smirks. But nicely.

"'Nuff of the sweet talk. Hit it."

All them gathered here, couple tables pushed together, the place empty & quiet otherwise.

"I didn't come back last night because my beloved sick in bed. Did radio show, then into bed with her. Medicine of nearness."

They nod appreciatively. But waiting.

Take a breath, jump in.

"There's a dragon, old as the world. His eyes are like tunnels, & you can follow them in, & in, & in—

"He's never quite finished, like all time extends along his back, each moment a scale still occurring, yet

also some flaking & falling away by some strange mathematic—

"He speaks: 'Part of how I am is how I am depicted & remembered.'

"He continues: 'I am ever emerging from the whorl you see in my eye.'"

I stop. They're listening.

I think. Look at Kinley, Christina, Maya, & Dylan, smile sorta, & say "You go back to FernKassi & continue your Model Islands adventure."

Look at Rey, say, "We're going back to the spaceship down there."

Before a word spake, I end the section.

cviii.

We walk in silence at first through store to the cooler room, past its jugs of milk & OJ & frozen foods & ice cream cartons, to the back where the curtain quietly hides the door down. Faded green & gold, I notice this time. Faded but indeed green & gold. Colors of magic in this imaginal world.

Looks at me in the dim. Stops & looks at me.
"Yes?"
"You make things so much harder than they need to be."
I nod.
"Why?" Curious, listening.
I shake my head. "Is there always a why? A fullblown why?
Shakes her head.
"Can we go now, Rey?"
"Are you sure?"
I nod.
"We're not going to count to 36, are we?"
"No," I say softly.

Surprisingly, she smiles, pretty, bright, excited. In another corner of this murky refrigerator, behind some well-placed shelving of old boxes of tools & what-not, she tugs out two knapsacks.

"Provisions?" She nods me.
"Two?"
She laughs a little as she hands me one. "Guess I hoped I'd be going with a friend."
We put on our knapsacks & suddenly hug.

She pushes the curtain aside & we slip through. Pull it back in place. The stairway climb down is sort of similar to last time. Her leading, our hands clasped, & how it feels like disintegration more than descent. My thoughts loosen, scatter, crumble.

OK, maybe it's worse, I lose sense of her, of me, of stairway, of damned near everything.

But in my mind still is a soft, a beautiful *hmmm* & I know it's her, whoever she is, & I should join in

best I can, whatever this means, & I do, & it's like now I have something to hold to, a towline back to me, onto her, on down, alien & terrifying as all this is, I hang on by the *hmmm* & eventually something, something, *something*—

And, like waking from a heavy & forgotten where in dreaming, arrival. To my name, to my what, to hers, to this travel, OK, then, OK.

She's smiling. "OK?"
"OK."

A key, a dance, a cackle, maybe more, & the door to the buried spaceship opens & we both step in. She waits a breath, & then pulls the door locked behind us. I think she'll lead us but, no, we walk, side by side, hand in hand.

This hallway feels different, feels more familiar. No, wrong word . . .

"Friendlier," Rey smiling says.
"Does this spaceship know me better this time?"
"Yes, of course. It's not inert."
"Nothing is," I finish her sentence & realize I am no longer talking aloud.

"Oh."
"Yah. Haha!"
"Telepathy."
"Kind of."
"Because we are touching, holding hands?"
Nods.
"I wrote about this. Well, sort of. Algernon Beagle wrote about it in *Bags End News*."
"Called *Symbiosis.*"
"A sort of language connection by sight, sound, touch, taste, smell."
Nods. I'm not sure which one of us is nodding & which "speaking."

I stop. Let go her hand. She allows me reluctantly.

"Can you see the contents of my mind? My memories?"

"I don't think it works like that."
"How then? We were finishing each other's sentences."
She shakes her head, the half with long hair swishes by the shaven side & back. Her green & gold eyes sparkle me. "I think Symbiosis is harder for people-folk than Creatures. Also, you & I are new to each other."

I wait, nod. Go on.

"Think of it like we're visiting each other's homes. We let each other see as much as we choose. We're closer by it, than regular language, but we don't have to show any or all."

I nod again. Take her hand, which makes her happy.

The hallway is endlessly long & no doors this time. Encouraging time to talk before arrival? OK.

"Where are you from, Rey?"
"Is that important?"
"It's a start. I think it's one way for you to show me around your mind's home."

She nods slightly. "Should I let you decide?"
"Decide?"
"This is your book."
"No."
"OK. I'm not sure."
"How did you end up at Chief Seattle's Friendly Market in the White Woods?"
"I came from down here."
"This ancient spaceship buried in the earth?"
"Yes."
"You lived here?"
"I passed through. For a long time."
Hm. "Are there others here?"
"Like me?"
"Or not. Are we going to meet others?"
"Yes. I mean, I don't think anyone lives here, but they pass through, like I did, like you & I are now."
"So the ship doesn't move but beings within it do?"
"Yes! Sort of. But yes & sort of."

Quiet. Thinking. Walking steadily side by side in this friendly glowing place, when we come to a fork. Left hand hallway continues like this, same glowing, same friendly feeling.

The right hand hallway is very different though. Wooden, floor, walls, ceiling, Looks ancient somehow, aged in a way that indicates much traffic through it.

We stand, look.
Her smile lights my mind's home.
"Which, Ray?"
"Do you know either?"
"Do you?"
"The wooden one a bit more maybe. This one too but I think that one might lead to a green field & a strange being-entity."
"Friendly?"
"I think so."
Quiet.
"Do you know anything about this, Rey?"

Her mind's home dims around me. "This is the answer to a lot of questions you could ask."
Instead of just nodding or saying something else, I close my eyes, grasp her hand tighter, & release myself to this place in her mind, this mental externalization or whatever.

Bump into hard & soft things, reaching, feeling around. She is quiet, waits.

Then I have an idea. I reach in the pocket I'm sure my pants must have, even as I am sure I am both

bodied & clothed. *There.* Box of matches. Red Dog Diner. Pull a wooden stick out & light it up & look.

Oh. *Oh.*

"The wooden hallway, for sure."

To be continued in Cenacle | *104* | *June 2018*

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NEW ENGLAND

Notes on Contributors

Algernon Beagle lives in Bags End. He is the Editor guy for *Bags End News*. Delightful books made from the stories in his delightful newspaper appear regularly in *The Cenacle*.

Charlie Beyer lives in New Castle, Colorado. Has me mulling his offer to go "hovering up a wild river here, and gold panning when we get somewhere. The gold is everywhere." More of his writings can be found at http://therubyeye.blogspot.com.

Ace Boggess lives in Charleston, West Virginia. His poems appear regularly in *The Cenacle*. His poetry in this issue is from his most recent book, *Ultra Deep Field*, published by Brick Road Poetry Press in 2017. We discovered recently that we share a love for the indie rock bands Camper Van Beethoven & The Jayhawks.

Joe Ciccone lives in Chestnut Hill, Massachusetts. His poetry regularly appears in *The Cenacle*. He is currently on a sailing trip from Harwich to Nantucket in a 20-foot boat. His 2000 poetry RaiBook, *North of Jersey*, can be found at: http://www.scriptorpress.com/raibooks/northofjersey.html

Allen Ginsberg was born in Newark, New Jersey, in 1926, & died in New York City, New York in 1997. His most famous book, *Howl & Other Poems*, was published in 1956, & helped launch him into a decades-long career as poet, prophet, & psychedelic visionary. His poem "Howl" can also be found in the Burning Man Books series, online at: http://www.scriptorpress.com/nobordersbookstore.html.

Judih Haggai lives at Kibbutz Nir Oz in Israel. Her poetry appears regularly in *The Cenacle*. Her recent comment on these days: "Strange times—a feeling of impermanence, love, loss, gain, joy." Her 2004 poetry RaiBook, *Spirit World Restless*, can be found at: http://www.scriptorpress.com/raibooks/spiritworldrestless.html.

David Hartley lives in Maryland. His *Rants* last appeared in *Cenacle* | 100 | June 2017. Elaborating on his reference in the new *Rants* to himself as a scientist, he notes: "I was a senior chemistry lab technician, & developed semiconductive polymer, which causes linear voltage variance under physical pressure."

Jimmy Heffernan lives in Salt Lake City, Utah. His piece in this issue is adapted from his *Divided Quantum* series, found at dividedquantum.net. He & I did the content adapting together, coming out with a nice result. Jimmy's most recent book, *Nonlocal Nature: The Eight Circuits of Consciousness,* was published by New Falcon Publications in 2017.

Jack Heitner lives in Connecticut. His poetry appeared several times in early issues of *The Cenacle*. His poetry in this issue is excerpted from his 1990 book, *Connecticut Moutain Poems* (also published in full in *Cenacle* | 2 | April 1995). I called him a dear friend for many years, & hope that he is happy & healthy, & climbing many a Connecticut mountain (& elsewhere), since his recent retirement from teaching English literature at Central Connecticut State University.

Nathan D. Horowitz lives in Kansas City, Kansas. Chapters from his epic work-in-progress, *Nighttime Daydreams*, appear regularly in *The Cenacle.* Lately he's been travelling the American continent, in search of the best place for him & his family to land. More of his work can be found online at: http://www.scribd.com/Nathan%20Horowitz.

Colin James lives in western Massachusetts. His poetry appears regularly in *The Cenacle*. Strange to say, but true, that Colin, an English gentleman, & Kassi, from middle America, both share a love of the New York Football Giants. His most recent book of poetry, *Resisting Probability*, was published by Sagging Meniscus Press 2017.

Gregory Kelly lives in England. His poetry last appeared in *Cenacle* | 99 | April 2017. Regarding his poem in the current issue, he writes: "I was sitting at my office desk, at home, looking out the window, and saw the birds intertwining in their flight."

Tamara Miles lives in Elgin, South Carolina. Her poetry & prose appear regularly in *The Cenacle*. She hosts a literary group at https://www.facebook.com called "The Curiosity Salon," which is a friendly online home for beginning & seasoned writers alike. She also hosts the excellent monthly poetry show, "Where the Most Light Falls," on SpiritPlants Radio (spiritplantsradio.com).

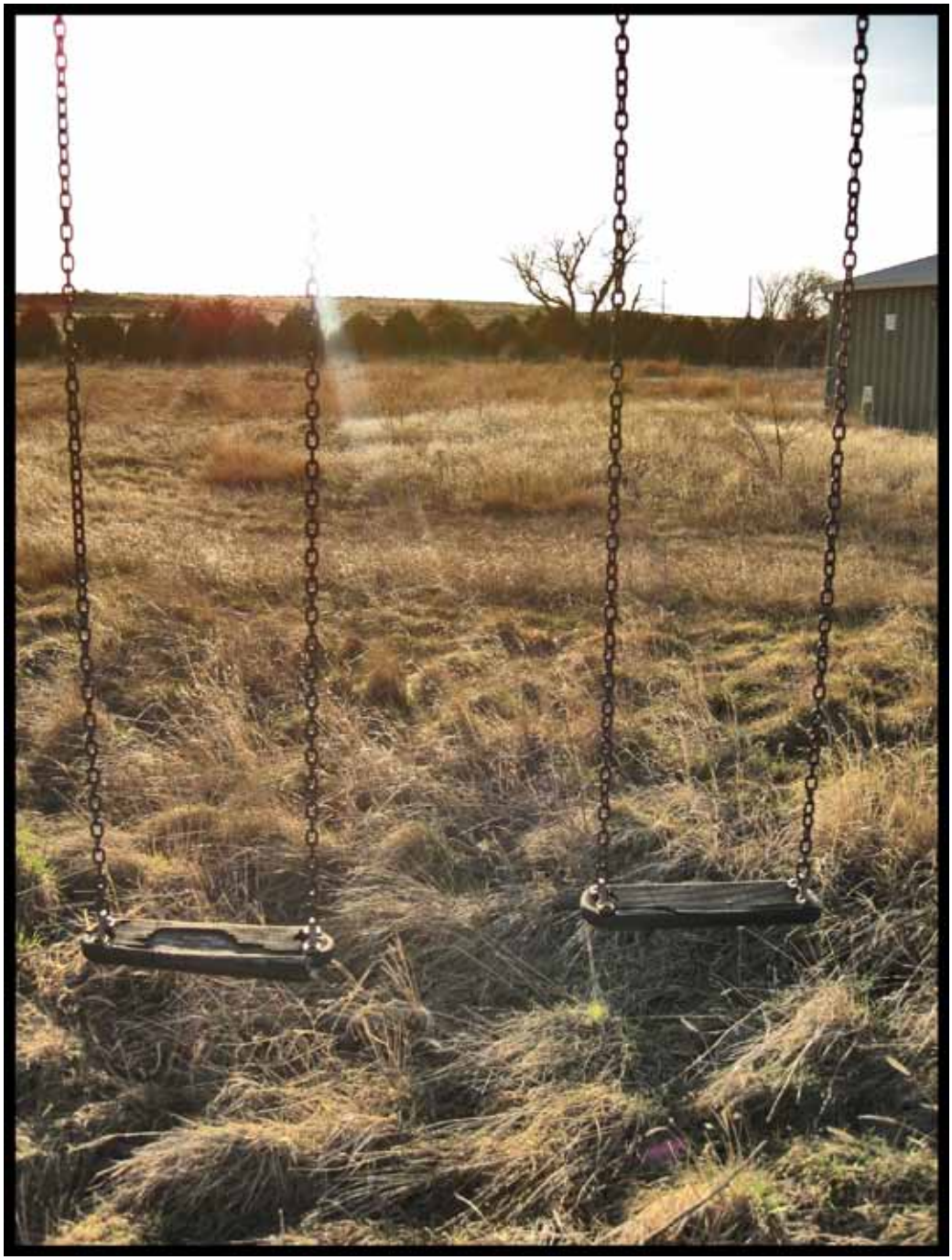
Martina Newberry lives in Palm Springs, California. Her poetry appears regularly in *The Cenacle*. She's a gifted & unmet (in person) sister to us on the lovely Left Coast. Her recent book of poetry, *Never Completely Awake*, was published by Deer Brook Editions in 2017. More of her writings can be found at: https://martinanewberry.wordpress.com.

Anaïs Nin was born in Neuilly-sur-Seine, France in 1903, & died in Los Angeles, California in 1977. She wrote & published many journals over the course of six decades.

Tom Sheehan lives in Saugus, Massachusetts. His poetry appears regularly in *The Cenacle*. His latest news to report is that he is "immersed in a new manuscript & working hard." His most recent book of cowboy stories, *Beside the Broken Trail*, was published by Pocol Press in 2017.

Kassandra Soulard lives in Melrose, Massachusetts. She's making monster cookies for my birthday today, to enjoy during the Jellicle Literary Guild meeting tonight. So many of my loved ones from the past I wish could have known her as I do.

Raymond Soulard, Jr. lives in Melrose, Massachusetts. Today is my birthday. Spending it with pen & press & beloved, grateful beyond knowing, & always hoping to do better showing this.

* * * * * *

Maybe it would have been better
if that had been all I wrote, all my life,
without alphabet, without interpretations,
a single dark blow
without words.
--Pablo Neruda, "The Blow" (111), 1969.